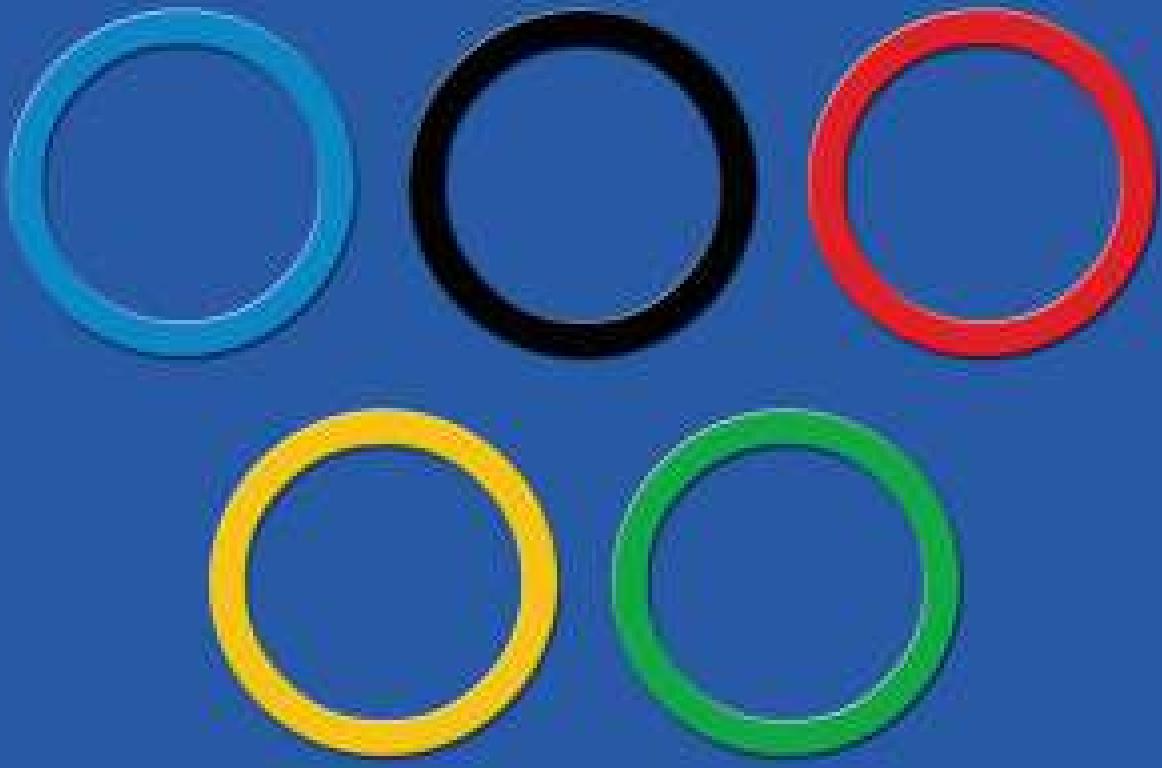


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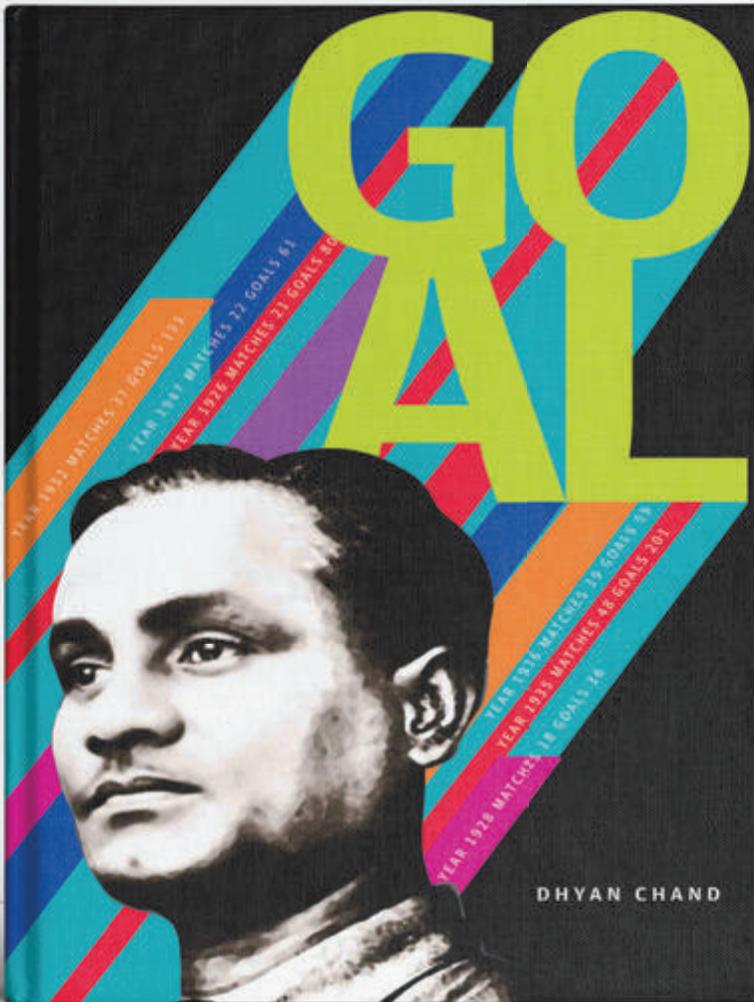


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A letter to our readers

Dear readers,

We are all facing immense challenges because of the Covid-19 pandemic. While we unitedly fight this latest threat to humanity, life as we know it stands transformed.

Your health and wellbeing are of paramount importance to us and we at *Sportstar* ask you, dear readers, to stay indoors so we can emerge stronger from this crisis.

The pandemic has also forced us to take some extraordinary decisions, and for the first time in nearly 42 years, we have decided to put our print issue on hold till at least April 15. The nationwide lockdown enforced for our safety makes it near impossible for us to ensure the delivery of your favourite magazine to your doorstep. We are, however, committed to restarting the print magazine at the earliest. For the time being, we offer this free downloadable version of the magazine. We have also made our April 4 issue available.

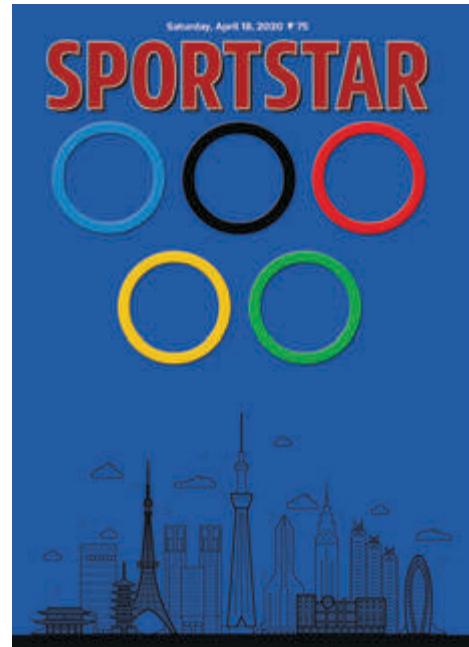
This issue highlights the challenges faced by the sporting world and will also offer a view of the #WFH (Work from Home) diaries of India's top athletes, like P. V. Sindhu, Mithali Raj, A. Sharath Kamal, P. R. Sreejesh, Shikhar Dhawan, Leander Paes and others. India's only individual Olympic gold medallist Abhinav Bindra in our Cover Story writes about the "right decision" to postpone the Tokyo Olympics to 2021 and the need for athletes to stay positive in these trying times.

To help you through these difficult times, we have also opened our archives and each day we will carry two long-form interviews from the past on our website sportstar.thehindu.com. These interviews will cover every sport and include personalities like Kapil Dev, Sunil Gavaskar, Sachin Tendulkar, Viv Richards, Imran Khan, Virat Kohli, Allan Border, Edwin Moses, Pargat Singh, Prakash Padukone, Carl Lewis and many more. You, too, can reach out to us on Twitter, Facebook or by email (sportstar@thehindu.co.in) and tell us about your favourite interviews and articles from past issues of *Sportstar*. We will be more than happy to republish them online.

There is also a Really Tough daily sports quiz and our reporters will continue to file special stories and interviews and ensure a regular reading fix for all of you.

Sport has always been a great unifier, a source of joy and hope across the globe, and it will re-emerge with renewed vigour once we are past this crisis. Till then, stay indoors, continue reading *Sportstar* and stay safe.

— Ayon Sengupta, Editor



4 The coronavirus pandemic has played havoc with human life across the globe, beyond anyone's imagination. Life goes on, sans the daily dose of sports. In such a depressing scenario, there was no other way than postpone the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, writes Abhinav Bindra.

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And more...

Design: R. Ravikannan

Poster: India's 2011 World Cup-winning team
(K. R. Deepak) (Pages 35-42)



All set and then... In this file photo, the Olympic Flame burns during a ceremony in Fukushima City, northern Japan. The Games have been postponed to 2021 following the Coronavirus pandemic across the globe. AP

The only way out!

There is a lot riding on the Olympics. The scenario has given a longer preparation time. Enjoy every moment, take all positives, soak in them, and resist frustration, so as to be at your best when it matters.

The majority of humanity is under lockdown. The unprecedented coronavirus pandemic has played havoc with human life across the globe, beyond anyone's imagination. Life goes on, sans the daily dose of sports.

In such a depressing scenario, there was no other way than postpone the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) had set a time frame of four weeks to decide on hosting the Olympics, but decided within two days.

We had a conference call before the decision was taken with 200 athlete representatives from International Federations, National Olympic Com-

mittees, IOC members and various others. It was decided that postponement was the best way forward, and was conveyed to the IOC administration.

So many countries are in a state of lockdown. It is a complex situation. For the Olympics, so much organisation is involved. There are so many stakeholders, the IOC, the Organising Committee, the Japanese government, sponsors and broadcasters.

Cancellation of the Games was never on the agenda. Everybody would like to see the Olympics. Now, when it is held between July 23 to August 8, 2021, it will be a celeb-



ABINAV BINDRA



Gone with corona: People look out from a highrise viewing area at the newly-built Japan National Stadium, the main venue for the 2020 Olympic Games, in Tokyo, the day after the historic decision to postpone the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games. The postponement of the Olympics has dealt a savage blow to Japan's hotels and tourism industry already reeling from the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. AFP

ration of humanity. In sport, timing is everything. You need to get the timing right.

The fact is, about 40% of the athletes have not qualified yet. The qualification events have to be held, and they have to make it as fair as possible. A schedule has to be made at a certain point. The IOC has already started working on them. The borders have to open, travel has to be revived.

Considering the complexity of the scenario, the decision was made quite quickly.

It was the right decision and good for everyone. It saved everyone the anxiety caused by uncertainty and suspense.

It was a relief for athletes, especially so as the earlier emphasis was that the Games would go on, as planned, on the original dates. World health is of primary importance, sports is secondary. All the athletes recognise the situation and appreciate this. The athletes are the most resilient species. They are used to a rejig of plans. The focus has to be to try and stay healthy. Make the



Get, reset, go: The countdown clock of the Tokyo Olympic Games was restarted in front of the JR Tokyo Station on March 31, 2020 in Tokyo, Japan. The Olympic Games will now be held between July 23 to August 8 in 2021 while the Paralympic Games will be held between August 24 and September 5, 2021.

GETTY IMAGES

best of what you have, when the world stands still.

It is indeed a huge challenge for Japan. I have never been to Japan. When they hosted the Asian Games in Hiroshima in 1994, I was not in the reckoning at that level. When they staged the Asian Air Gun Championship in Wako City in 2017, I had quit the sport. I was scheduled to be in Tokyo this April for a lecture, and wanted to look around a bit for myself, but had to cancel the plan. The efficiency of the Japanese is well documented. They have overcome many historic hurdles down the years to firmly stay on the road of progress. The

venues have been readied well ahead of time. The enthusiasm and zeal of the people to host the Games, as the most successful ever, is definitely an advantage in meeting the challenges.

There is no denying that it is a huge puzzle with so many different missing parts. The world economy scenario will play an important role. Apart from economy, several humongous challenges will be there, owing to uncertainty. The Olympic Games may have some changes. We don't know what is going to happen.

The bright point is that everybody is positive about the Games. Patience is the



Authorspeak: "It was a relief for athletes, especially so as the earlier emphasis was that the Games would go on, as planned, on the original dates. World health is of primary importance, sports is secondary. All the athletes recognise the situation and appreciate this. The athletes are the most resilient species. They are used to a rejig of plans. The focus has to be to try and stay healthy. Make the best of what you have, when the world stands still," says Bindra. KAMESH SRINIVASAN

need of the hour.

The situation is different for different athletes. Some may be on top of their game and ready to peak. Their good preparation may look to have been undone by the current scenario. The Indian shooters come in this category as they were on top of their game. They may have to restart and get it right all over again. Those who have been struggling, will heave a sigh of relief. They don't have to reach the Games under-prepared. They can make themselves better with the available time.

For the young athletes who are trying to build their career, it is a chance to learn. It prepares them better for life. In times like these, you learn to get out of the sport-centric bubble that you float around, and look at life with a wider lens. When you see what the world is facing, it helps you to

evolve as better human beings.

As athletes, we lead a privileged life. We have to be grateful for what we have. Appreciate the smaller things in life which we tend to ignore, and take them for granted, as a matter of right. There is grief and suffering, as people have a tough life. This should be a time for introspection and mental growth.

At the same time, it is important not to allow frustration to strike a negative streak of thoughts. It is time for athletes, to bond with family and friends. To show solidarity with them in this situation of global crisis. And to stay in a good frame of mind..

There is a lot riding on the Olympics. The scenario has given a longer preparation time. Enjoy every moment, take all positives, soak in them, and resist frustration, so as to be at your best when it matters. ☰

A RELIEVED LOT

With the Tokyo Olympics now scheduled to be held from **July 23 to August 8, 2021**, here's what some athletes, coaches and administrators have to say.

The news is a bit disappointing, but then again, human health is the priority. I am sure a lot of thinking has gone behind the decisions that have been taken. Please follow the WHO and government guidelines and stay at home.

— **Pistol shooter Manu Bhaker**



People should take this pandemic seriously and follow guidelines. They should do this voluntarily. Countries in Europe are very small and they have better medical services but they are facing a huge crisis. Our country is much bigger with a lot of poor people. If our country reaches stage 3 (of the pandemic) it may really have a devastating effect. We should try and contain the disease before that happens. So, each one of us should be a responsible citizen and try to maintain social distancing.

— **Javelin shooter Neeraj Chopra**

It's great to get some clarity about the new starting date for the Tokyo Olympic Games. This allows us to begin the planning process to be ready for July next year. In the meantime, we are looking forward to getting through this current tough period and hope to be back out on the training field as soon as possible.

— **India men's hockey team coach Graham Reid**



It's good we have certainty when the Olympics will be held and we can work towards that. We are all in the same campus and available for each other in these hard times, a new date for the Olympics is good news for all of us. But for now, we are living by the day, staying strong mentally and physically and wait eagerly to get back to our normal routine. We are prepared to hit the reset button.

— **India women's hockey team coach Sjoerd Marijne**



One can understand the uncertainty over this year's 2020 Tokyo Games due to the coronavirus pandemic because human lives are much more precious than anything in sport. The Olympics can wait. When you see the happenings around you, especially the sad situation in Italy where thousands of lives have been lost, you feel so emotional. We are staying positive, hoping that this would go away from this world soon. We are happy that efforts are being made here to ensure that the deadly virus does not reach the third stage.

— **Olympic track-and-field athlete P. T. Usha**

This was every athletes' worst fear and it has come true. Everybody knows that competing in the Olympics is the toughest test for an athlete but I believe waiting for an opportunity to be on that stage is tougher! I don't really know what to say right now but inside me there is a roller-coaster of emotions! This is a very crucial time for the world and the greater sporting fraternity. Though I am very deeply disappointed, it is important more than ever to see the silver lining in this dark cloud.

— **Wrestler Vinesh Phogat**



There were eight World cups but now there are only two left, which were supposed to happen in March but got postponed to June due to coronavirus outbreak. Given the situation, they perhaps will happen next year. So it gives me more time to recover and prepare for the two events. I will give my best to return to form and hopefully I can do well and qualify. But having said that, what is important right now is that we defeat this coronavirus, that is the priority.

— **Olympian gymnast Dipa Karmakar**

In view of the COVID-19 pandemic, I wish to donate my one month's salary to the PM National Relief Fund. So, please debit an amount of Rs 1,00,000 from my account.

— **Six-time world champion boxer and Rajya Sabha member M. C. Mary Kom said in a letter to the bank where her salary account is maintained**



First of all, we need to fight coronavirus. The situation in the whole world is very critical and having Olympics at this time is a big thing and we don't know how long it (coronavirus) will go. So, if the Olympics are held after coronavirus is controlled, it will benefit all athletes. So safety is first and then Olympics.

— **Wrestler Bajrang Punia**

OLYMPICS POSTPONEMENT REACTIONS

We didn't want to have the athletes in a position where they were counteracting government advice, maybe even breaking the law. And of course, in the back of their minds was always that concern, it wasn't just their own training programme, but that they ran the risk of effectively infecting themselves, their families, their kids, grandparents or parents, and we just wanted to take them out of that mental turmoil as quickly as we possibly could. We're no different from everyone else out there but I think we just concluded that sport, on this occasion, had to take a back seat.

— World Athletics chief **Sebastian Coe**



Of course this is a global problem. We must fight it. But what is crucial now is the safety of my family. That is why we are keeping safe as we see how things unfold regarding the virus. It has affected everyone around the world and the only solution is to follow guidelines set by the government.

— Olympic marathon champion **Eliud Kipchoge**

This is the time for people from all countries, backgrounds and races to rally together to save as many lives as we can. To me, that is the Olympic spirit. To the people of Japan: stay strong, hang in there, and let's show the world our beautiful country when the time is right in 2021.

— Two-time tennis Grand Slam singles champion
Naomi Osaka



If the Olympics had been cancelled, as opposed to postponed, that would've broken me as I wouldn't then have had a chance to do what no one else in taekwondo has ever done. I'm just grateful the Olympics are still on.

— **Jade Jones** on getting a chance to become the first athlete in her sport to claim three Olympic gold medals

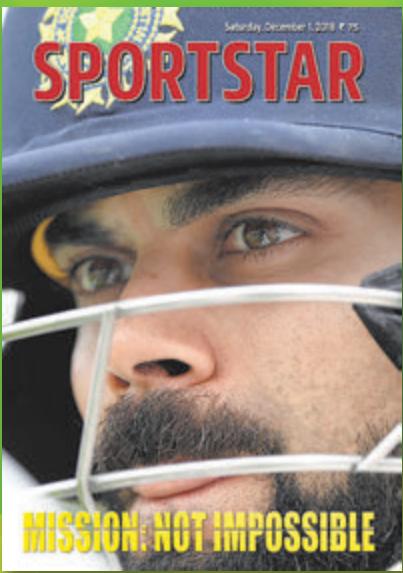
As athletes, we're so regimented. At this point, all the work is done. We're just fine-tuning the small things to get to this point. Now it's like, 'Oh ... we're not competing.' All these emotions start flaring up. I really think mental health is so important right now. Just control what you can control. We're in such uncharted waters. We're getting all these big questions thrown at us: What if? What if? What if? It's so hard to understand. We're having a hard time just wrapping our head around it.

— 24-time Olympic swimming medallist **Michael Phelps**





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It is difficult to be in isolation

In an interview, world badminton champion P. V. Sindhu shares her thoughts on the dreaded coronavirus pandemic and how she is spending her time at this critical phase.

V. V. SUBRAHMANYAM

World champion P. V. Sindhu is going through a different kind of experience at home – in self-isolation – on return from the All England Championships along with her father P. V. Ramana.

In a chat with *Sportstar*, the 24-year-old lead shuttler shares her thoughts on the dreaded coronavirus pandemic and how she is spending her time at this critical phase.

How were the last few days for you in the wake of the coronavirus fast spreading across the world?

I feel sad at what is happening around the world. These are extremely testing times for all of us. No doubt, it is very difficult to stay indoors, especially for athletes like me. But, again, there are certain things that are not in our hands but merit utmost caution in whatever we do. It is going to be tough, but we have to mentally prepared for the challenges ahead.

Do you have enough hand sanitisers and other related gear?

In fact, when we went to the All England Championships a few days ago just when the dreaded coronavirus was fast spreading and there were even serious concerns about playing there, we were fully prepared, armed with all these things, for safety and health are obviously the first priority. We had a huge stock of sanitisers and wipes, which we used to even clean the seats even though we were few in the business class. So, in a way, it was a different kind of experience but which again helped us to protect ourselves from the virus.



V. V. SUBRAHMANYAM



We didn't experience any tough times on arrival in London or in Hyderabad. The usual medical tests were in place thanks to the efforts of the government, which again should be appreciated.

Do you think your family might be fed up of you by the end of all this?

It is definitely not like that, for everyone is conscious of the dangers that are posed by the virus. So, like any other citizen, we too are taking care of ourselves by not moving out. In fact, after coming back from England, we were confined to our home.

How has your training been affected?

Yes, it is the longest break I have ever had since I started playing the sport. See, it is inevitable for obviously you cannot travel to

the academy and train as everything is shut down now, and it is the right thing to do. I don't think the break in training will have a major bearing when I start playing, for I have been doing physical conditioning exercises to stay fit and also bit of wall practice under the watchful eyes of my father (former international volleyball player and Arjuna awardee P. V. Ramana).

What do you have to say about the Olympics?

Frankly, right now I am not thinking about that at all. Yes, many big events which help the players pick up crucial points to qualify for Tokyo Games are cancelled. I don't know whether they will be held on schedule or postponed. It was appropriate to postpone the Games given the critical situation pre-

Truly special:
“When you go through these kind of moments, you would love to remember the highs of your career and for me the 2016 Rio Olympics silver (left) and the 2019 World Championships are the moments that I would love to see again and again whenever time permits,” said Sindhu. AFP



Passing time: "I watch some movies...not the full length, as I tend to switch on to other things," says Sindhu. K. PICHUMANI

vailing across the globe. It is great to see the organisers show so much concern for the health of everyone. Given the grim scenario, I don't think any sportsperson was solely concerned about the Olympics. We will have to take it as it comes.

Do you justify the hosting of the All England Championships while many other events are cancelled by the Badminton World Federation (BWF)?
Frankly, I welcome the decision to suspend

all BWF events till at least the second week of April. As far as the All England is concerned, it is for the BWF to take a call on the criticism. I don't want to get into that.

What videos would you love to see during this break?

Honestly, there is nothing specific. I spend my time watching Netflix, listening to music (again, nothing in particular). Yes, when you go through these kind of moments, you would love to remember the highs of your career and for me the 2016 Rio Olympics silver and the 2019 World Championships are the moments that I would love to see again and again whenever time permits. They are truly special for me.

What are your hobbies and are you able to enjoy during this break?

Honestly, before this break, there was no time, literally, at all to think about what I would like to do in my free time, for the schedule was so demanding and I had real difficulty in balancing my training, commitments and spending time with my family members. But now, I watch some movies, again, not the full length, as I tend to switch on to other things.

Well, news is what I am watching the most now. I am keen to know what is happening around the world. Of course, I miss my nephew (elder sister's 18-month-old son Aryan) the most, though I make video calls to him.

Which players or teammates would you like to be isolated with or hate to be (in a lighter vein)?

It is difficult to be in isolation. But, by god's grace, it is my dad who is with me. It is a blessing in disguise that he was with me in London for the All England. I couldn't ask for a better person than him. Being a sportsperson, he knows how to keep my morale high and obviously spends lot of time in giving useful tips about improving my fitness and game, too.

Does sport matter in these times?

I must say it is a difficult phase. We have never faced this kind of experience before. Apparently, when everything is shut down for the fear of the virus, you can't expect sporting activity to go on. After all, safety of one and all is the priority of the government and also the responsibility of every citizen. ☺



#WFH: "I am right now in Guntur. With the Academy shut down and all BWF events suspended, there is very little I can do except trying a few things to stay fit," says Kidambi Srikanth. AP

2017 and after!

Injuries at crucial times have hamstrung Kidambi Srikanth. The threat of the Coronavirus is not helping either.

V. V. SUBRAHMANYAM

Kidambi Srikanth must be thinking how true the old adage is — scaling the summit is easier than staying there for long!

Well, this badminton champion was on top of the World, ranked No.1, in April 2018. Things looked really rosy during that phase. But then, there was a slump, primarily because of injuries.

In an exclusive chat with *Sportstar*, the quiet and easy-going shuttler shares

thoughts of his journey, how he reached the pinnacle and where his career is headed now.

"Six years before I became No.1, I remember I was ranked World No. 336. Then, the target was to think of being in the top 300, then in 250, then 200, and so on before aiming for the top 10," he recalls.

"I travelled to quite a few places after having got hooked to badminton seeing my elder brother play in my hometown, Gun-

**One step at a time:**

"Six years before I became No. 1 (in 2018), I remember I was ranked World No. 336. Then, the target was to think of being in the top 300, then in 250, then 200, and so on before aiming for top 10," says Srikanth. AFP

tur. Then, things began looking different when I finally settled down at the Gopichand Academy in Hyderabad," he traces his route to stardom.

"The first time I got the feeling that I could be there with the best was when I won the 2012 Maldives Open. It was not a major title when you look at the BWF events. But, that was one triumph which gave me the confidence and self-belief that I could move on and on," says Srikanth.

How was it possible? What were the major changes that he had to make?

"The year 2017 was the crucial one. For, those 12 months were the best in my career when I won four Super Series titles)," says the articulate Srikanth. He is the only Indian to do so and join the illustrious band of shuttlers such as Lin Dan, Chen Long and Lee Chong Wei.

"Well, there were no specific changes in terms of my game. But yes, training under Mulyo (Handoyo), who made us do a few things differently, had a huge impact on my career graph," he points out.

Was it a conscious effort to get to the top?

"Definitely not. I always wanted to get better and better. And worked really hard to achieve that milestone which honestly was not my target," he says with a smile. "Well every player would go through similar phases and I am fortunate to have the com-

plete backing of my parents, elder brother (K. Nandagopal) and more importantly Gopi Anna (chief national coach, P. Gopichand) and the entire staff of the Academy who went all out to back me," he says.

Does he see videos of inspirational achievers or of his own achievements? "Not really. Only if I am playing the same opponent, I will see those matches just to get mentally better prepared," says the shuttler.

During the build-up, Srikanth also had two of the most traumatic episodes in his life — falling unconscious in the washroom during a training session at the Gopichand Academy and then suffering a career-threatening injury.

"Yes, I am unlucky that way. I got injured every time I was on the verge of breaking into the next stage like during the Nagpur Nationals in 2017. But, I always tried to be positive," he says.

Srikanth makes an interesting observation, too — when you are playing at the highest level, on a different plane compared to the rest, you have to be extremely fit to sustain that level of excellence.

"But, these injury-breaks were a big curse for me and that really dented my performances after being the World No.1," says the 27-year-old shuttler.

Srikanth also believes that having



Guiding force:
Srikanth with his
coach Pullela
Gopichand in 2017.
“I travelled to quite
a few places after
having got hooked
to badminton
seeing my elder
brother play. Then,
things began
looking different
when I finally
settled down at
the Gopichand
Academy in
Hyderabad,” he
traces his route to
stardom.

NAGARA GOPAL

achieved a certain level, he may have pushed himself that extra bit to stay there. “I don’t believe it was a poor selection of tournaments. It had to do with injuries.

“See the irony now. I am fit and raring to go. But this dreaded Coronavirus has put paid to my dreams of participating in the Tokyo Olympics,” he says.

Srikanth, even while welcoming the decision to postpone the Tokyo Olympics, scheduled to be held this July/August this year to 2021, owing to the coronavirus threat, feels that the BWF should think of a timeline for the Games only after it starts all the tournaments which were cancelled recently.

“It is a good decision as it is next to impossible to host the Games given the critical scenario across the world,” Srikanth told *Sportstar*.

“But, again, I personally feel that the BWF should have a serious mindset, once the situation improves and is deemed fit for any sporting activity, about starting the tournaments which were cancelled in the wake of the Coronavirus threat,” he said.

“I appeal to the Olympics organisers

and the BWF to wait before straightaway declaring the next possible dates of the Olympics. There has to be a periodic, critical review of the situation before going ahead with the timeline,” he felt.

Reflecting on his preparations, Srikanth admitted it will be a difficult phase in the run-up to the next schedule of the Games.

“For the last 12 months you have been tuning your physical and conditioning programme according to the original schedule. Now, you have to re-set the goal and plan these programmes accordingly. It is a huge task and a different kind of challenge for any athlete,” the champion shuttler said.

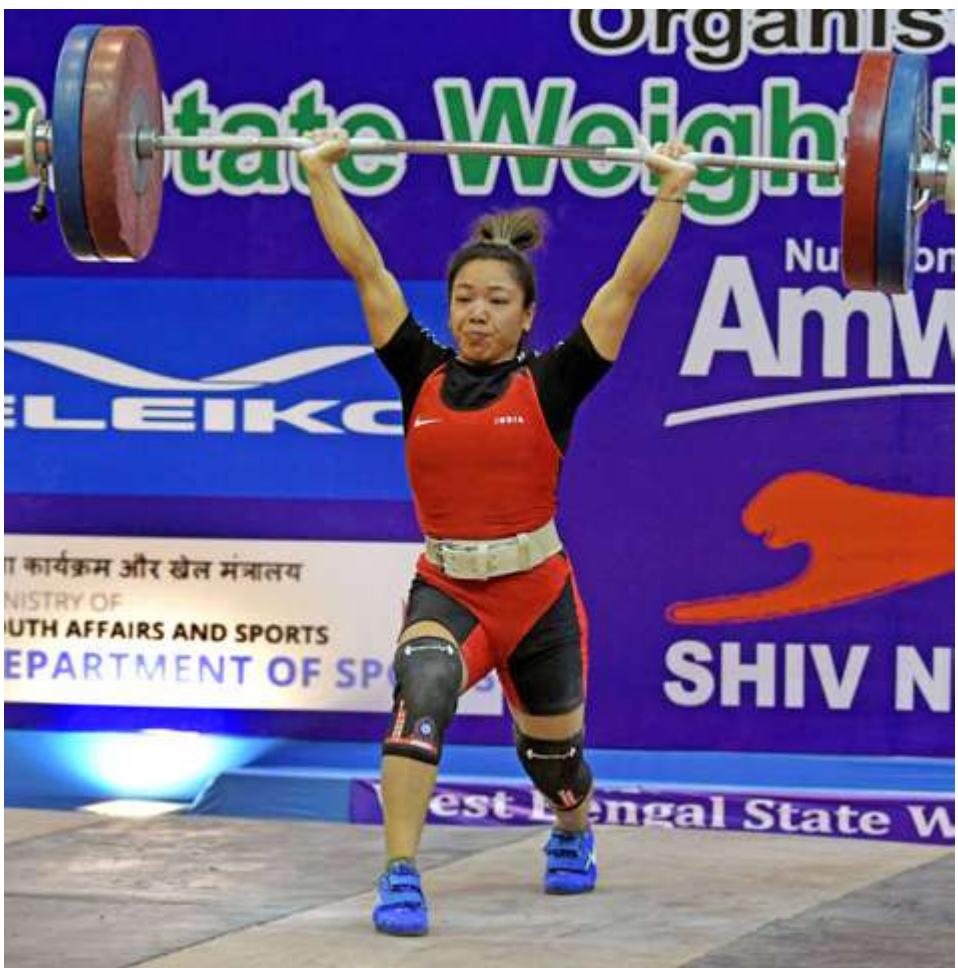
And, he adds that it has been a harrowing experience to be away from the sport. During injury-breaks he could at least visit the stadia and mix with fellow players and coaches. That’s not possible now.

“Right now, I am in Guntur with my family members and friends. But, I am definitely doing those minimum exercises to stay fit and appeal to all the citizens to adhere to the guidelines of the Government and stay indoors till the situation improves,” he concludes. ☈

On track:

Mirabai Chanu improved her own records in the snatch, clean-and-jerk and total (203kg) at the National Championships in Kolkata in February.

RAJEEV BHATT



It's the same for everyone

"Sometimes it is boring to stay restricted, but no one can help it. After all, such measures are going to help us fight the coronavirus," said Mirabai Chanu.

Y. B. SARANGI

Former world champion Mirabai Chanu, who is adhering to self-isolation owing to the global coronavirus outbreak, is not keen on facing the possibility of another situation like this.

But the Manipuri weightlifter is sure of qualifying for her second Olympics.

According to the original IWF qualification criteria, an athlete has to compete in at least one ranking event — such as gold level (world and continental championships), silver level (IWF events, including multi-discipline games and championships) and bronze level (other interna-

tional competitions) — in each of the three periods starting from November 1, 2018 to April 30, 2020; six overall; and at least one gold level and one other gold- or silver-level event.

Points will be awarded for these performances and the best results in each of the three periods will be considered to ascertain the rankings.

Mirabai has accumulated 3,869.8038 qualifying points from five outings to be placed fourth in the women's 49kg category. The top eight lifters in each weight category will qualify for the Tokyo



Olympics, which is now scheduled to be held in 2021 because of the global coronavirus pandemic that has brought sports to a standstill worldwide.

Notwithstanding the distractions provided by the pandemic, Mirabai is focused on her training keeping the Olympics in mind. After the Asian Championships, an Olympic qualifying event, in Tashkent was postponed, she had changed her routine.

"The training now is different as there is no competition right now. We would have trained differently had the competitions were on schedule," said national coach Vijay Sharma.

Mirabai, who uses her cycle to commute between her room and training centre of the National Institute of Sports campus in Patiala, gave an idea about her present training schedule. "I am working on fitness and endurance. The training is low on intensity. As there is no competition in sight, there is less stress on lifting," she said.

Mirabai's determination has doubled in the last four years following her disappointing showing at the Rio Olympics. The Indian registered three 'no lifts' in the clean-and-jerk to return without a rank from the Games.

However, she improved her game to take

Still in waiting:
Jeremy Lalrinnunga and Rakhi Halder (right) are yet to secure quota places for the Tokyo Olympics, which is now scheduled to be held in 2021.
GETTY IMAGES &
RAJEEV BHATT

**Keen to do well:**

Mirabai's determination has doubled in the last four years following her disappointing showing at the Rio Olympics. The Indian registered three 'no lifts' in the clean-and-jerk to return without a rank from the Games. REUTERS

the women's 48kg title at the World Championships in Anaheim in the USA a year later. She secured the Commonwealth Games gold medal in 2018 before facing another setback.

A mysterious lower-back issue forced her to pull out of the Asian Games that year, but the gritty lifter fought back to assert her class with a fourth-place finish by lifting 199kg at the 2019 Asian Championships in Ningbo City, China.

Mirabai showed steady improvement as she aggregated 201kg to claim fourth position at the 2019 World Championships in Pattaya, Thailand. Only four women could breach the 200kg mark in that event.

The 25-year-old went one step better by improving her own records in the snatch, clean-and-jerk and total (203kg) at the National Championships in Kolkata in February this year.

Her brilliant comeback has put her Olympic dream back on track.

"My preparation has been going on nicely. An athlete keeps on getting roadblocks throughout her career, but one must overcome these to achieve one's goal. One should stay focused and do one's job."

"This (coronavirus pandemic) is an extraordinary situation which has affected the whole world. There is nothing much one can do about it," said Mirabai.

The Manipuri does not mind following some restrictions in order to stay safe. "It is important to stay isolated in order to stay safe in such a situation. The campus is locked down for the visitors and we are taking some precautions and not going out to avoid any threat."

"We are not even going out to malls and markets on weekends. Sometimes it is boring to stay restricted, but no one can help it. After all, such measures are going to help us fight the coronavirus," said Mirabai.

"The whole world is affected. It's the same for everyone (lifter)," said Mirabai. ☈



Indian wrestler Ravi Dahiya with his bronze medal after defeating Iran's Reza Ahmadali Atrinagharch at the World Wrestling Championship in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan, in 2019. "My performances have boosted my confidence a lot," says Dahiya. PTI

Training is paramount

The fire in his belly does not let Ravi Dahiya sit quietly. As a junior wrestler, he has seen hard days and is eager to prove himself at the highest level.

Y. B. SARANGI

For Ravi Dahiya, whose life revolves around wrestling, Chhatrasal Stadium in Delhi is home away from home. In fact, Dahiya spends most part of the year in the precincts of Chhatrasal and visits his home very rarely — perhaps once in a year, during Diwali.

So, when the Government gave a call for self-isolation at home to fight coronavirus, Dahiya — who shifted from his village in Sonepat district of Haryana to Chhatrasal at the age of 10 — did not have to think twice.

"I thought, since there was not much time in hand, I should focus on my preparations. I can go home later on after the Olympics," said the World championships

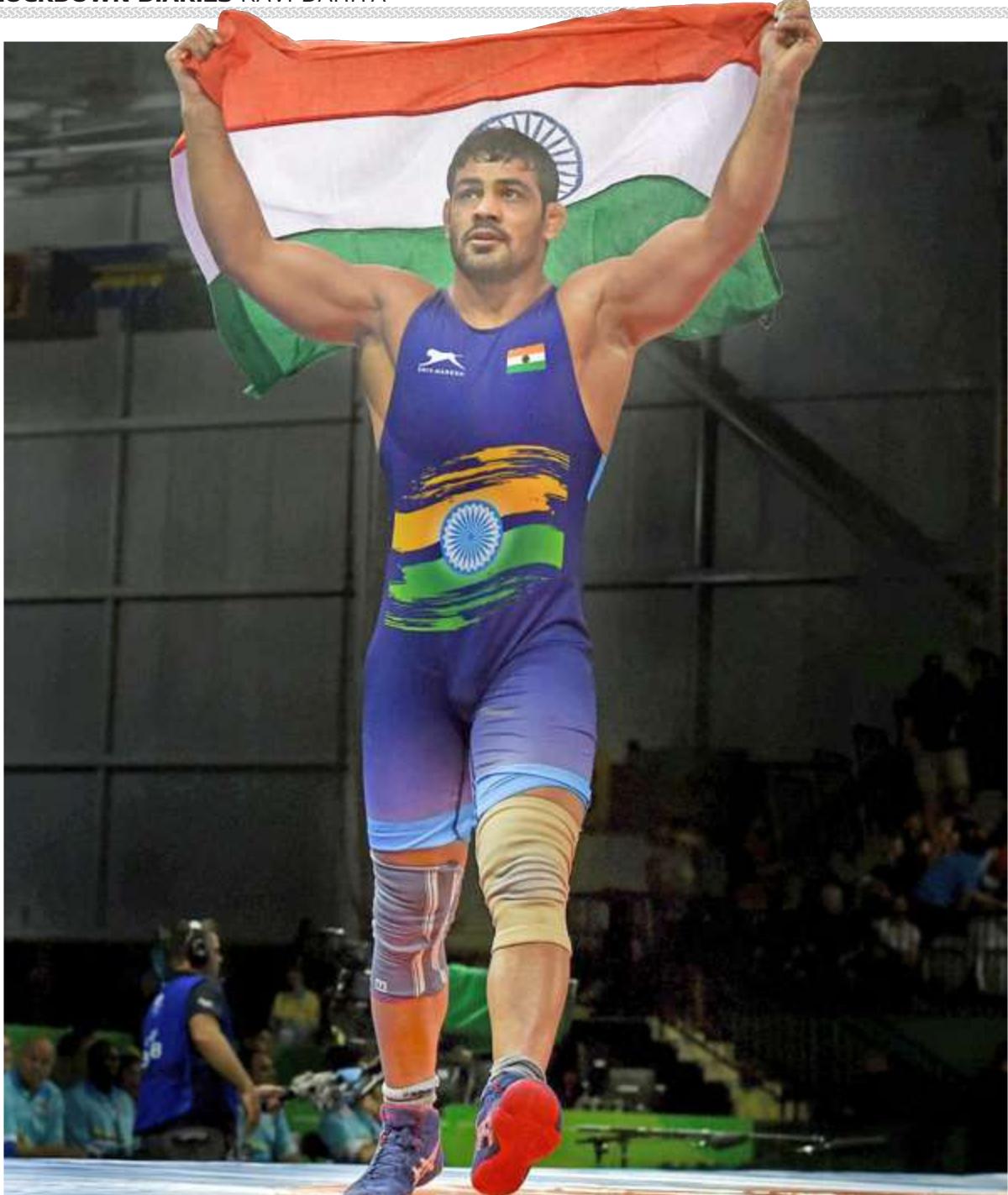
bronze medallist and the Asian champion in men's 57kg weight class.

Despite the postponement of the Tokyo Olympics, Dahiya sounded positive.

"Nobody knows when the Olympics will take place. It is not in our hands. God knows when it will happen and how it will happen. But it will happen for sure. I hope everything will be alright. I am just concentrating on my training."

The fire in his belly does not let Dahiya sit quietly. As a junior wrestler, he has seen hard days and is eager to prove himself at the highest level.

"In those days there was no sponsor and I had to fall back on some of my well-wishers

**Hero worship:**

Dahiya is a big fan of his mentor and two-time Olympic medallist Sushil Kumar. PTI

to recover from my knee injury. It was a struggle. I was frustrated due to the uncertainty (related to my recovery). Good that the days of struggle are gone now," an emotional Dahiya had told this reporter sometime back.

Dahiya, who secured a World under-23 silver medal in 2018, hogged the limelight with a series of sterling performances for champion side Haryana Hammers in the

2019 Pro Wrestling League. He continued to raise his game and emerge as the number one wrestler in the country in the competitive 57kg category.

Considering his dedication and improvement, it was only natural that he impressed one and all with his bronze medal winning performance in the World championships in Nur-Sultan, where he also secured an Olympic quota place, in September



last year.

Dahiya, who had lost in a bronze medal match in the Asian championships in Xi'an in 2019, made amends to take the title in the continental event in Delhi in February last.

"After the World championships bronze medal, I emerged as the champion in the Asian championships. My performances have boosted my confidence a lot," said Dahiya, looking back at his short journey.

A big fan of his mentor and two-time Olympic medallist Sushil Kumar, Dahiya — who is considered a top contender for a medal from the wrestling mats of the Tokyo Games — is not resting on past laurels. His next goal is an Olympics medal and he is leaving no stone unturned to achieve this.

"There is not a particular area on which I have to work on. I need to improve in different areas, such as leg defence and counterattack."

For this, training is paramount for Dahiya. Even the coronavirus threat cannot deter him.

"There are issues, but those have not affected my training. Sparring is going on. Three-four wrestlers are there in the Chhatrasal Stadium, we are doing our daily training. There are wrestlers of different weights, I am sparring with them. So, my training is not affected."

Dahiya, like Sushil, loves to learn by watching others in action. "I am watching the videos of my opponents to learn a few things and know about their weaknesses."

Dahiya, however, is missing his room partner Deepak Punia, who had bagged the silver medal in 86kg category alongside Dahiya in the World championships apart from securing an Olympics berth. "Deepak had gone to meet his family for some work. He has not been able to return."

Nevertheless, Dahiya has been behaving responsibly in the time of crisis. "One has to adjust a little bit in such a situation. We are taking all sorts of precaution. We are not going out, not meeting outsiders, washing hands and maintaining good hygiene."

For younger wrestlers looking up to him, Dahiya has some advices to fight the deadly virus which is wreaking havoc worldwide.

"The Government is doing so much to stop this virus from spreading. Our Prime Minister Narendra Modiji has sent out a message for every countryman about what one should do and what one should not do in the fight against corona."

"We should follow these advices without panicking about the virus. No need to fear. If we remain careful, then we will win this fight against corona," said Dahiya, with a sense of responsibility. ☈

Best friend forever:

Dahiya is missing his room partner Deepak Punia, who had bagged the silver medal in the World championships apart from getting an Olympics berth. "Deepak had gone to meet his family for some work. He has not been able to return." PTI

Inspiring the lot:
Posting inspiring one-liners, sharing his younger child's video, sharing pictures of his teenage years – boxer Vijender Singh is doing everything to keep himself occupied. He hopes that his fans take cues from this to stay busy in the time of isolation.

SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA



Looking at the positives

Boxer Vijender Singh has been enjoying time with his family. Besides, he has been taking to the social media to underline the importance of breaking the social chain in the fight against coronavirus.

Y. B. SARANGI

'Bahaduri ghar pe rahne mein hain (One needs courage to stay at home)," reads one of Vijender Singh's Twitter posts, tagged with one of his photos.

A former World and Olympic medal winning boxer, Vijender, who has remained unbeaten in his 12 fights since he began his professional career in October

2015, last fought against Charles Adamu of Ghana in November last year.

With a cloud of uncertainty over his next fight, which was supposed to happen sometime in May, the super middleweight professional boxer is looking at the positives of the forced break due to the coronavirus outbreak.



A stylish boxer and a youth icon, Vijender — who got into politics by contesting in the last Lok Sabha elections with a Congress ticket from Delhi — understands the importance of having patience and staying indoors in this extraordinary global crisis. He himself follows this golden rule and inspires others to do the same.

Vijender has been enjoying time with his family. Besides, he has been taking to the social media to underline the importance of breaking the social chain in the fight against coronavirus.

Posting inspiring one-liners, sharing his younger child's video, sharing pictures of his teenage years — Vijender is doing everything to keep himself occupied. He hopes that his fans take cues from this to stay busy in the time of isolation.

Vijender took some time out to speak to *Sportstar* and share his future plans, his ideas about fighting the deadly virus and the Indian boxers' preparations for the Olympics.

At this time of crisis, when you cannot step out of home, how are you keeping

yourself engaged?

It's a good opportunity to stay with your family, spend some valuable time with people who are so close to you.

It's very relaxing to be with family without anything to do. I am enjoying staying at home.

What about your next fight? Has it got affected by the coronavirus threat?

My next fight was scheduled to be held in May (in America). The details were not known. Now there is a lot of uncertainty over it because of the prevailing situation. Even though I am not sure when exactly it will happen, I think it should take place sometime in July. Right now, there is no clarity.

Since you are restricted to your home, how are you training?

It's not possible to do full-fledged training. But I am doing my conditioning. I am doing punch-ups, chin-ups and other such exercises which I can do at home to keep myself fit.

When things become normal, I will go

What next?

Vijender (left) throws a punch at WBO Oriental Super Middleweight champion Zulpikar Maimaitiali during their double title bout at the National Sports Complex of India (NSCI) Dome in Mumbai on August 5, 2017. With a cloud of uncertainty over his next fight, which had to happen sometime in May, the super middleweight professional boxer is looking at the positives of the forced break. AFP



Piece of advice:
Vijender Singh at his home in Manchester. "Stay indoors. Avoid going to public places unless it is absolutely necessary," says the boxer.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

back to the gym and increase the intensity of my training in the run-up to my next fight.

At a time when the whole world is facing a pandemic and there seems to be no end to it in the next few weeks, what is your message to your fans and followers?

Stay indoors. Avoid going to public places unless it is absolutely necessary. Just avoid any place where there can be more people. The biggest positive for us in this crisis is that it has given all of us an opportunity to spend time with our families.

In today's world, people stay busy with their respective jobs and hardly find time to spend with their close ones. We should make the most of it and make the situation lighter with the support of our family members.

We will face a lot of problems if we don't

follow the Government orders and stay indoors. We should wash our hands and maintain personal hygiene. There is a lot of rumour going around in various social media platforms. We should avoid those to not let unnecessary fear bog us down. The most important thing is not to get sick and we should behave sensibly to achieve that.

Do you think the postponement of the Olympics will affect the Indian boxers?
It should not affect our boxers' preparations. It is good that nine of them have already booked Olympic quota places.

What about the uncertainty? It is likely affect to the morale of the boxers...
They should continue with their usual training. They are already in training and should remain focused on it. They should not bother about other things. ☰



Not tied down: Tajinder Pal Singh Toor in action in the men's shot put at the World Athletics Championships in Doha, Qatar, in October 2019. AP

Shot-put short-circuited!

UTHRA GANESAN

Since the government-mandated lockdown of sports centres owing to the Coronavirus threat, national campers across sports have been in a state of flux. At the NIS, Patiala, while those inside insist their lives haven't really changed in terms of daily schedules, the uncertainty is definitely a concern.

Shot-putter Tajinder Pal Singh Toor is among those who admit the clampdown was necessary.

What is the situation right now at the NIS?

Since the national camp and the NIS campus have been sealed right now, we cannot move anywhere. There is a total lockdown of the premises, all competitions have been cancelled. I am talking to you after my training session; I was supposed to be throwing at the Indian GP. But we have

been told that all competitions have been pushed back to at least after May 15 for now.

It's not like we feel tied down; we are used to being in camps for long periods and our schedule doesn't allow much socialising anyway. But this lockdown is for our good only, if there is any infection inside it would be more dangerous. I think this is one of the very few centres in operation even in lockdown, otherwise across the world most training centres have been shut. Those athletes cannot even train anywhere.

Can you explain how things panned out since the virus news first broke?

Honestly speaking, it didn't look like it would become so serious so quickly. Yes there were concerns when it first broke but till it reached India, there was no idea it

This lockdown is for our good only, if there is any infection inside it would be more dangerous, says star shot-putter Tajinder Pal Singh.



Asia's best: (from left) silver medallist Wu Jiaxiang of China, India's Tajinder Pal Singh Toor, the champion, and third placed Ivan Ivanov of Kazakhstan at the medal ceremony of the Asian Athletics Championships in Doha, in 2019. AP

would be such a situation. But now like we are seeing and the way it spread so fast in a country like Italy with a low population and better medical facilities — *hamari to population hi bahut zyada hai* in comparison (our population is so much more).

Other training venues and grounds are also shut, at least in Punjab I know, and athletes are struggling to do something with their time.

Now there is a nationwide curfew, all grocery stores are seeing a rush with people stocking up on daily essentials. This is a problem.

All this is happening for the past 8-10 days, it was controlled before that. People need to become more aware both in terms of their behaviour and precautions. All schools, colleges, offices are shut down to prevent the spread of infection but people are seeing this as vacation time, visiting relatives and friends!

They should stay home and stay protec-

ted. *Log holiday feeling le rahe hain!*

Is it easier for someone like you, who spends a large part of the year in camps and competitions, to adjust to this situation?

Yes and no. See we do not really feel much difference because we do not have the kind of daily home-office-home routine like most people. Our lives, in any case, mainly revolve around our room, ground, gym, mess through the week.

But the absence of competitions and clarity does affect one. The Indoor Asian Championships in China was cancelled. We were told about the GP being cancelled only at a very short notice. I am fit now, I was all set for trials, threw 20.43m and feeling good for more, we are all training hard but we don't know for what. It is very disappointing and disturbing. I am not sure what will happen.

It is not easy to maintain peak form and



fitness for a long period of time, but we are looking at tweaking the training schedules and repetitions as per the coach's advice. Mentally also it is not easy to stay focussed for so long if everything is delayed.

How is your family handling it?

As of now they are fine. I speak to them daily and had told them to stock up the required daily needs because you don't know how long the lockdown might continue. So things are under control and the family is fine. Of course, there are small problems in terms of movement — I have told them to try and avoid meeting too many people for some time, you don't know who is infected. Stay home as much as possible.

What do you do in your spare time now that you can't go out anywhere?

Through the week there isn't much time anyway between training and rest. It's a set routine. Sundays, as rest days, used to be boring, yes, but we could go out and spend time earlier. Now it will get double boring inside! I spend some time on social media

and I think I will also download PUBG now and start playing that like everyone else! (He is also very active on TikTok and Instagram). It does get a bit frustrating but as I said, it's for a few days and it is only for our own good, we should manage it willingly.

What if you had to be isolated? Who would you want that to be with?

(Discus thrower) Gagandeep Singh. You put us together in a room for 2-3 weeks and we won't be bored, between us we will manage full time-pass!

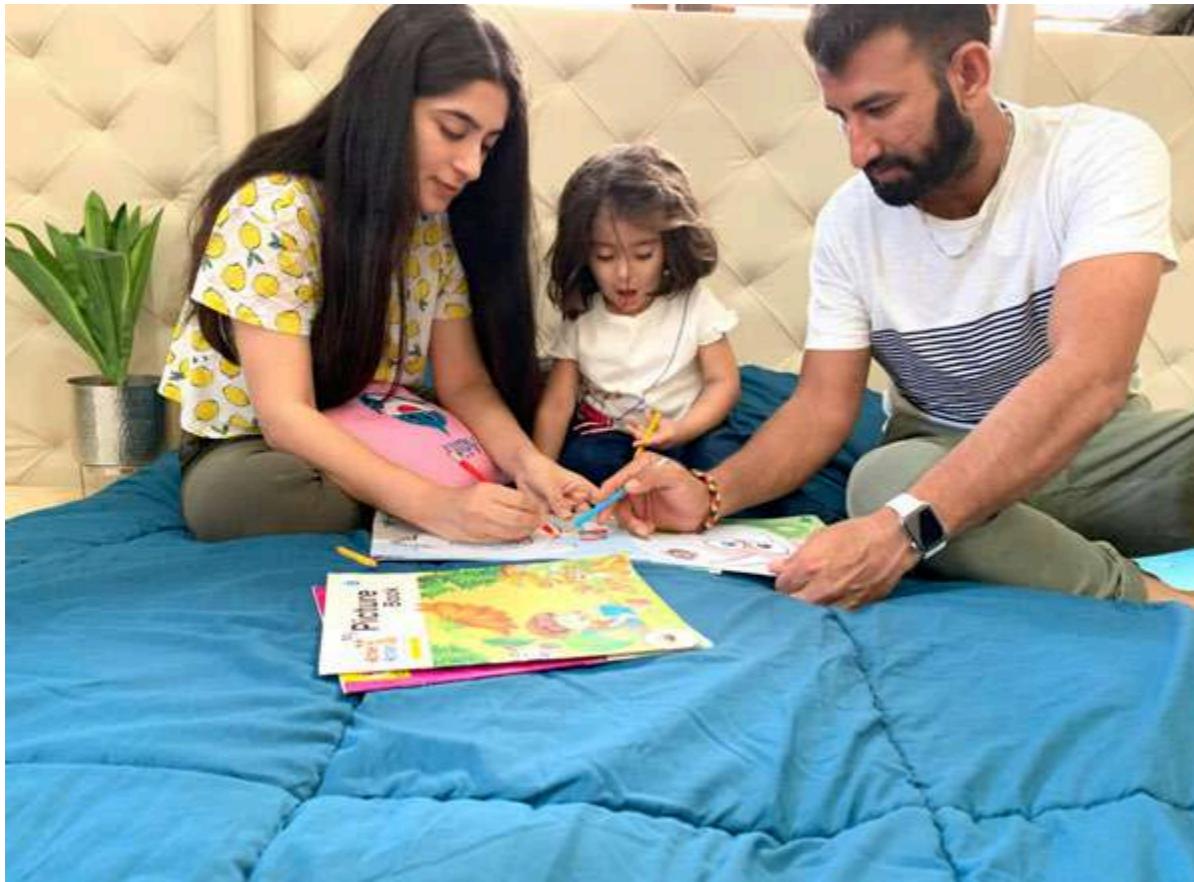
Your message to your family, friends, fans?

The most important thing is life. *Jeevan hogta tabhi sports hogta* so the most important thing is to save yourself first. To do that, I would only tell them to stay safe, meet as few people as possible, stay home, wash your hands regularly.

Try not to touch anything unnecessarily and if you do, make sure you clean up immediately. Take all precautions, it is never too much. Stay healthy, stay safe. ☺

Honoured: Union Minister for Youth Affairs and Sports, Kiran Rijiju, presenting the Arjuna Award to Tajinder Pal Singh Toor in New Delhi in November 2019.

SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA



Family man: Pujara enjoys spending time with his wife and daughter as he stays indoors in support of the government's lockdown call. TWITTER@CHETESHWARI

The fight can be won by staying indoors

AYAN ACHARYA

Pujara, part of the Saurashtra side that beat Bengal in the Ranji Trophy final, is using the downtime to enjoy a relaxed routine at home.

Even as the Novel Coronavirus continues to cripple major sporting events across the world, with the global number of confirmed cases increasing by the day, India No. 3 Test batsman Cheteshwar Pujara has called on fans to rally round each other.

"These are tough times not just for our nation but the entire world. The only way we can fight this pandemic is by staying indoors," Pujara told *Sportstar*.

"It can be frustrating at times. There will be days when you'll have to resist the urge to go out for a casual stroll, but we have a responsibility to look after our country and family and the best way to do it is by remaining in self-isolation at home," he added.

Pujara, part of the Saurashtra side that beat Bengal in the Ranji Trophy final, is using the downtime to enjoy a relaxed

routine at home with his young daughter. "It's a welcome change for me," he said. "I like spending time with myself, reading a book or watching TV is something I would do when I'm alone. That said, I've a young daughter who is so energetic and wants to play all the time, so half my day goes into taking care of her. I'm also helping my wife Puja with the daily chores."

The 31-year-old, who suffered from back spasms during the Ranji final, has recovered and started training again. "I've a gym at home where I do all my workouts, so I haven't had to venture out to train either," he said.

The anticipation of periods of home confinement has led to panicked shoppers stripping many grocery stores of staples ranging from bread and milk to meat and



sanitisers. Pujara, however, cautioned against hoarding.

"We don't believe in stocking up because then you are causing unnecessary trouble to those who desperately require those items," he said. "Only buy what you need. The government will ensure that production of essentials is not impacted in the wake of the pandemic. I've heard that in some places they've even started home delivery of day-to-day necessities like packets of rice, vegetables, fruits and grains. So there is no need to panic; it's time for the selfishness to end. We need to look after each other."

Although sport itself has become a casu-

alty in times of distress, Pujara reminded why a discipline, which often offers escapism in the face of adversity, needs to take a backseat for now.

"I feel sport really has the power to bring people together but now is not the time for fans to throng stadiums in support of their teams and players," he said.

"Yes, you still need to stick together but with your family in your own homes. In a crisis such as this, I feel the biggest fight is going to be the fight to be indoors. For a sportsman, the fight is out on the field, for a soldier, it's the warfront but this particular battle can only be won by staying indoors." ☈

Doting husband:
"I'm also helping my wife Puja with the daily chores," says Pujara, seen cleaning the floor at his house.
TWITTER@CHETESHWARI



I'm seeing my daughter grow on a daily basis

It is happy family time for tennis star Rohan Bopanna, as his parents, sister, brother-in-law and niece are there together with his wife Supriya and 10-month-old daughter Tridha.

Back at home: The 40-year-old Rohan Bopanna, who has a mixed Grand Slam title to his credit, is quite mature to look at the crisis scenario with equanimity. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

KAMESH SRINIVASAN

These are difficult times, but Rohan Bopanna has no complaints. He is at his coffee estate in Coorg, huddled with family.

"We are tackling things on a day-to-day basis. It is not easy to ask the plantation workers to stop. We take precautions. One day we had only the men working. We make sure that they don't stand close to each other. We are creating awareness. They wash their hands before they go home. It is a challenge for everybody. No matter who you are, it is not easy," said the former world No. 3 doubles tennis player.

Bopanna, who had helped India win the doubles rubber with Leander Paes against Croatia in Zagreb in losing cause in the Davis Cup in March, feels that he was lucky to be in Coorg instead of the US.

"During the Davis Cup, everything was fine. After the tie I was in Doha, waiting overnight for the flight to Los Angeles. Sumit Nagal and Prajesh Gunneswaran travelled through Europe to the US. Since doubles was Friday, I had booked through Doha. I had the option of a hotel in Doha, but stayed at the airport. Physio Gaurang Shukla had also joined me to be on the same flight. About an hour and a half before the morning flight, we got the news that Indian Wells tournament had been cancelled.

We managed to change our ticket to India, for the evening. We spent time at the airport, using the swimming pool and the gym, on a pay-and-use basis. We spent nearly 18 hours at the airport. My wife and daughter were supposed to join me in Doha for the US trip. But we had cancelled the plan because the coronavirus situation had started getting serious. We didn't want to expose the kid," recalled Bopanna, who was obviously thrilled to spend time with his family in the serene atmosphere of Coorg.

It was a 16-hour flight to the US that he skipped, and he felt that had he boarded, he may have been tempted to stay back in the US, looking for other events. It was a blessing in disguise as the situation forced Bopanna to eventually have a good time with his family.

"Even in normal days, there are very few people here in Coorg. It is so peaceful to be with nature. So different from staying in apartments. We have lots of option for walking, jogging. There is one shop where we get our stuff. It opens from 12 noon to 2pm. Only one person goes, as it is easy for the shop to keep a record," said Bopanna.

It is happy family time for the tennis star, as his parents, sister, brother-in-law and niece are there to-

gether with his wife Supriya and 10-month-old daughter Tridha.

"We closed the academy in Bengaluru and sent the players home till the end of March or till we figure out the situation," he said. It is a pleasant experience for Bopanna to see his daughter grow on a daily basis, rather than being content watching her on Skype or FaceTime.

"On the positive side, I see my daughter grow. I see her every day. I am so happy to be with her. She is crawling. She is starting to stand up. Being with her is very special," Bopanna said.

The 40-year-old, who has a mixed Grand Slam title to his credit, is quite mature to look at the crisis scenario with equanimity.

"The ATP events are closed till June 7. It is extremely difficult for everybody. They have frozen the rankings. There is no solution in sight. Eventually, a lot of players may lose points. I can't be in their shoes. Everyone can't be happy at the same time. Well, it is not easy to be an athlete at this time," he observed. There is no question of tennis training for Bopanna.

"It is tough to train, not knowing when it is going to start. When you are in the off-season, or coming back from injury, you know how long you are going to train. I don't see any reason hitting a tennis ball today. (But) There is no purpose to train (right now). That is the tough part," he said.

Bopanna is happy that he is not just a tennis player, but also has a tennis academy apart from his coffee business. For many, tennis is everything. They lose their earnings when there is a shutdown.

"Not earning money is the tough part. We have to understand. I can't do much about it. I can't control things. We are used to a certain life, staying outdoors, constantly being out, travelling. The challenge is to stay positive and find ways to keep well. Years of experience has taught me that it is not only the athlete who is facing the situation; it is for everyone," he said.

Such an appreciative outlook on the positives of life in a difficult situation may not be easy for young athletes who may be "focused so much on building a career," he said. But Bopanna is amazed and amused by the number of solutions offered to counter the coronavirus pandemic.

"On social media, everyone is a doctor! It is very difficult to decide what to believe and what not to believe. I tell my dad, 'Don't believe every forwarded message,'" he said.

Understandably proud to have fought hard and won the doubles rubber with Paes "playing his last Davis Cup tie," Bopanna said India had to win the first singles rubber against Borna Gojo to stand a chance of winning the tie.

"In doubles, we missed match points in the second set. We came back from being a break down in the third to win. After being down 0-2 in the tie, it was special. The quality of the match was very good. What made the difference was that we had trained the whole week. You



Family time: Bopanna with his wife Supriya. PTI

need to be there, hang out together, to fight through the match. The loss in the first singles match was hard for us," Bopanna said.

"Prajnesh will beat Gojo in any Challenger or Tour event when he plays him next time. There is a big difference playing the Tour and playing the Davis Cup for the entire country. If we have to make the World Group, we have to win the singles matches. I talked to the team after the tie in the locker room. (Marin) Cilic under pressure of being 0-1 and Ramkumar (Ramanathan) playing the best match I had ever seen would have given such a different tone to the tie.

"We have to look at Leander Paes, how he breathes fire when he plays the Davis Cup. I have been playing the Davis Cup for 18 years. Playing for the country is so different. Sumit (Nagal) could have played better against Cilic. Prajnesh could have fought even better when he was 2-4 down in the third set. We are there, (but) still we are not there," Bopanna pointed out.

The last time India figured in the Davis Cup World Group was when Somdev Devvarman and Bopanna "played unbelievable" to win the reverse singles against Brazil in Chennai in 2010 after the team was 0-2 down on the opening day.

Bopanna had played two singles then, while Leander Paes and Mahesh Bhupathi had anchored the revival with the doubles win.

For the moment, Bopanna is happy to push tennis aside and focus on the simple things of life and play with his daughter. ☺

Stay safe: Grasping the gravity of the situation, Apurvi Chandela and family are quite practical, back home, in Jaipur.

KAMESH SRINIVASAN



Rifle shots from Jaipur

Apurvi Chandela is proud to utilise the free time, brought about by the coronavirus, constructively, and faithfully follows the call of the nation to stay at home.

KAMESH SRINIVASAN

Around this time last year, Apurvi Chandela was busy competing in World Cups. After a phenomenal season, when she won two individual gold medals in women's air rifle, an accomplishment in the event after Anjali Bhagwat's gold in a World Cup, way back in 2003, the 27-year-old

Apurvi is quite serene at home in Jaipur, when the world grapples with the coronavirus.

"I drove back to Jaipur, with my brother, to avoid taking any flights. Since Jaipur is only four hours away from Delhi, it wasn't that difficult," recalled Apurvi.

BLAST FROM THE PAST

INDIA'S 2011 WORLD CUP TRIUMPH

ICC Cricket World Cup 2011

SPORTSTAR

APRIL 18, 2020

PAGES 35 TO 42



CHAMPIONS



The leading Indian shooters were having an Olympic selection trials after the postponement of the World Cup, in Delhi. Apurvi was occupied with the training camp, followed by the trials, when the coronavirus crisis was gathering momentum.

"We were all faced with the uncertain situation during the training camp, as the first few cases of coronavirus in the country were detected. We were preparing for the World Cup in Delhi. The decision to postpone the World Cup was necessary for the safety of all the shooters, whether in India or from foreign countries, who would have had to travel in the given circumstances. It was also good that the national federation took the decision of holding the trials instead of the World Cup, as it was the last match to be considered for the Olympic Games selection," said Apurvi, as she summed up the scenario, in a dispassionate way. The shooters were cautious, and so was Apurvi.

"I stayed at my uncle's place, during the

camp and the trials. My mother didn't accompany me this time. I would wash my hands every few minutes or sanitise them. I stayed at home post shooting to avoid coming into contact with anyone," said Apurvi.

Grasping the gravity of the situation, Apurvi and family are quite practical, back home, in Jaipur.

"My whole day is absolutely packed. I have a shooting range at home. So, I wake up early and shoot. We have asked all the house help to stay at their homes for their and our safety. I help my parents with all the household work. We have divided the duties between my father, mother and me. My mom takes care of the cooking. I do all the cleaning of the house. My father helps my mother in the kitchen. He also looks after our dogs in terms of feeding them and bathing them. In the afternoon, I spend time reading. During the evening, I do my exercises and yoga," said Apurvi, quite nonchalant about having to execute mundane work on a regular basis.

In fact, Apurvi is proud to utilise the

Making up the mind: "I plan on training well and continue doing the exercises. It is important to keep ourselves occupied with some work, so that we remain healthy, not only physically but mentally as well," says Apurvi. AP



Top guns: Apurvi, who won the gold medal (centre) in the women's 10m air rifle event, with Chinese Zhao Ruozhu (left, silver) and Xu Hong, the bronze medal winner, in the shooting World Cup at the Dr. Karni Singh Range, Tughlakabad in New Delhi in February 2019.

KAMESH SRINIVASAN

time constructively, and faithfully follows the call of the nation to stay at home.

"I think it is a great initiative by our honourable Prime Minister. At this time, it is absolutely necessary for each and every one of us to stay at home and stay safe. On March 22 at 5 p.m., I went on the terrace with my parents. It was a feeling of pride to see the unity of the whole country. We needed to thank the medical fraternity who have been working tirelessly for our safety and well being," she said.

The Olympics has been postponed to next year. That may be a disappointment for the athletes who were keyed to peak for competition in Tokyo. But, Apurvi views the big picture with equanimity and understands the need of the hour.

"I plan on training well and continue doing the exercises. It is important to keep ourselves occupied with some work, so that we remain healthy, not only physically but mentally as well. It is good to see that the earth has also got some time to heal. We all

have such fast paced lives that now we have time to reflect upon where we are headed! I will be using this time to work on myself, and also spend quality time with my family," she said.

The precautions are well maintained.

"I am staying at home and not going out anywhere. I am washing my hands regularly, taking care of myself and staying fit," Apurvi stressed.

The magnitude of the situation is not lost on Apurvi.

"Looking at the current situation, since we are all under lockdown, I am sure there are athletes whose training must be getting hampered, especially those who are in outdoor sports. And the situation around the world, particularly in Europe and America, that are seeing a rise in the number of people being infected, I sincerely hope it settles down as soon as possible. We need to prepare for any kind of scenario and be ready to accept any situation we are faced with," Apurvi signed off. ☈



Helpless: "When you are at home 24x7 in urban India, training goes for a toss," says Sharath Kamal.

K. PICHUMANI

It seems as if life has come to a standstill

"The good thing is you are with your family all the time but on the flip side you just cannot do anything that either you or the kids want. These are difficult times," says the paddler.

AMOL KARHADKAR

You are 38, hoping to have one last shot at glory by first qualifying for what would be your fourth Olympics and then hoping for pulling off a miracle in Tokyo. You are getting into the groove, having put aside the disappointment of not qualifying for the first team championship in Olympics, and having won your first ITTF Pro Tour title in 10 years in Oman a week earlier.

A. Sharath Kamal couldn't have asked for a better build-up ahead of what would

have been an Olympics qualifier event in April. Until, of course, the time stood still, with the COVID-19 pandemic pushing most of the world — and all of India — indoors.

The veteran paddler spells out the difficulties in dealing with the unanticipated challenge the epidemic has thrown, on and off the table.

How are you, macha?

I am just putting on weight. Can't do much. The kids are driving us crazy. And there's

**Home, sweet home:**

Sharath Kamal with his daughter and son. "There's so much uncertainty and we just don't know when normalcy would be restored. Till then, it's just about spending time with the family and enjoying it as much as you can."

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

uncertainty about the outside world. What else can happen these days, you tell me (laughs).

How much did the COVID-19 threat linger over the Oman Open, incidentally the last big event in ITTF that also turned out to be your first international title after a decade?

It was a huge factor right through the week. All of us players were skeptical about the disease being transmitted but somehow we saw through the week unscathed. My family was dead against me travelling to Oman for the tournament. They said there's no need to take such a big risk. It took me real long to convince them that I have been training so hard for this one — and more importantly for the Olympics qualifiers which were then scheduled early April — I had to request them to let me go. Luckily I won the title. Had I not, I am not sure if they would have opened the door for me on my return.

It seems you have more than done your bit now. I am sure you had promised the kids to not go anywhere for two weeks after returning from Oman...

Hahaha, indeed. All of them were happy with it initially but I don't know if three weeks down the line, they will ask me "kab jaa rahe ho (when are you leaving)". It's pretty hard, *yaar*. Yes, the good thing is you

are with them all the time but on the flip side you just cannot do anything that either you or the kids want. These are difficult times.

Does anything come close to this experience?

Nothing, *yaar*. Don't think anyone of us would have even thought about what's happening right now. Yes, I was immobile for almost six months following my (hamstring) injury and the rehab (2015) but that was different. Despite being unable to do anything back then, I had something to look forward to. I had a goal to get back on my feet and go through the daily chores, and eventually get back on to the table. Right now, it seems as if life has come to a standstill. There's so much uncertainty and we just don't know when normalcy would be restored. Till then, it's just about spending time with the family and enjoying it as much as you can.

So what can you do as an athlete in such a situation?

What can we do! That's what. SAI (Sports Authority of India) asked me how could they help me in some way. They have been reaching out to all the top athletes. I told them there's absolutely nothing that you can help us with. There's no chance of us being able to train right now. When you are at home 24x7 in urban India, training goes for a toss.

For the first couple of days, since you are excited, you do some videos about keeping yourself fit but that's more of a gig for the Instagram feed than actual training. It doesn't serve any other purpose. On top of it, the morale is down. You can't go anywhere, can't do anything that you want, you've been reading or watching only about one thing, so you don't feel like doing anything. When I was injured, I, at least, had something to look forward to. Now I don't know how long this will last.

Can you plan anything now that the Olympics has been postponed?

Olympics was bound to be postponed because the Olympic movement just cannot observe social distancing. One of the hallmarks of Olympics is tens of thousands of athletes across the world eat together and mingle with each other. Now that main objective for the year has been deferred, which is good in the given circumstances. But there's nothing in sight right now to set your eyes on. Earlier they had suspended the ITTF circuit till April end but now they have announced that the China Open and the Hong Kong Open — the two big events scheduled in May — have been cancelled, so that's also gone. It was expected, but now that it's formal and there's no need for an Olympics qualifier event which may have been slotted end of May, I doubt if we'll play a tournament until August. UTT (Ultimate Table Tennis, franchise-based league in India which was earlier scheduled to start right after the Olympics in August) was supposed to be the last tournament of a hectic season, and now it could well begin the next cycle.

So how are you coping with this situation?

It's very difficult *yaar*, especially to keep yourself motivated. To begin with, I don't know when am I going to play a tournament next. So, to keep myself motivated is the hardest part.

I also personally don't know how to go about it. I've been thinking about it and at times I feel it's best to stop thinking about it, enjoy the break, spend time with the kids and wait for normalcy to return. But even then, it's not really a holiday. At times, when you're on a break, you want to do certain things or the kids want you to do something they like.

During my break, I would like to do a



light sport or take the kids out for a swim but all that's just impossible for the time being.

What have you been doing for the last couple of weeks?

Absolutely nothing. Just eating. Putting on weight. You know I have a tendency to put on weight. For the time being, I have given myself the next two weeks to do what I want and then figure out the next course of action. Probably, the world would have also figured a way out by then.

You haven't had a hit on the table since your return from Oman?

No. I don't have a table at home. My parents' home (where his younger brother Rajat also resides) has a table, so only today did I jokingly tell my daughter 'let me go over there and have a hit' and she said: "no way, what will we do here then!"

How are the kids responding?

They are fine. My daughter knows the risks and she understands the importance of staying indoors. Tejas (two and a half years old) is too young to understand it, so he wants to step out all the time. It's a little bit hard but we have to manage it, just like the rest of the world. ☺

In the limelight:
Sharath Kamal receives the Padma Shri Award from President Ram Nath Kovind at the Rashtrapati Bhawan, in New Delhi in 2019. "It's very difficult especially to keep yourself motivated, in the present circumstances," says Sharath Kamal of the lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic.

SANDEEP SAXENA

Saying goodbye:

Leander Paes was honoured at the Tata Open Maharashtra in Pune in February. The tennis legend has announced this will be his farewell year in the sport.

R. RAGU



It is important for us to innovate

"It's also very important to watch one's diet. Because when idleness comes around, the natural human instinct is to eat a lot," says tennis ace Leander Paes.

SHAYAN ACHARYA

For the last three decades, Leander Paes has been following a strict routine — start the day early, hit the gym, train hard and get ready for a game. That's how life has been for the Indian tennis ace.

For Paes, travelling 35-40 weeks a year is also part of the game.

But as the world has come to a standstill because of the coronavirus pandemic, Paes is spending his time differently. At his Mumbai residence, the 46-year-old is busy training his daughter Aiyana and sharing some good times with his parents.

"It's an interesting time," Paes said with a smile, as he spoke about life in the times of the coronavirus.

At a time when stepping out of home is not an option, how are you keeping yourself engaged?

It's an interesting time because we all are trying to be innovative in occupying our time. For me, work involves 35-40 weeks of travelling. So, this has given me a great opportunity to spend time with my loved ones — my parents, my daughter. This is the

time to have meals with them, interact with them and also show Aiyana how to do home training. To basically create a home training system. It also gives me a chance to catch up on all my business and other work, and also communicate — via video-conferencing — with my team around the world.

What's the training regime that you are following these days?

That's the hardest bit. My whole job has come to a standstill. A lot of people like me are not being able to focus on their profession and, hence, are losing earnings, training... In these times, one needs to be innovative in terms of training and be very patient. As far as training goes, I am doing a lot of home training, keeping up with my cardio work on my static cycle at home. I have one of those racing bikes which is put on a stand. I use that. I am doing back exercises, slow routines. I use rubber bands as weight, so I use innovative methods in the house.

I'm very lucky to have vast experience over the years of travelling to different hotels and travelling to different cities and different countries every single week, so I have had to adapt accordingly. So, this is just one such way of testing how one can adapt to another new situation.

You were travelling when the pandemic broke out. How challenging was it to return home and ensure that the training process wasn't affected?

Since the beginning of the year, as the Australian Open and the Davis Cup finished, everything has come to a standstill. Indian Wells (BNP Paribas Open) has come to a standstill. That tournament has lost a hundred million-plus dollars in revenue. Miami (Open) has come to a standstill likewise. Now, the French Open is postponed. The whole clay court season is lost, so Monte Carlo, Rome, Madrid are cancelled. We have to find a way to just be patient, and the call of the day now is to do the best by our community by staying at home. Especially in India, it is very, very important that we do not let this pandemic grow fast. Because of our population, already the medical fraternity is getting stretched in not just containing the virus, but also in testing.

You test someone today and two days later you have to retest them. So, how is it possible to sustain medically? It is our imperative that we as a community realise that



the best way to stay healthy and to stay safe is to stay at home.

This is your farewell year in professional tennis. So, how much has this pandemic affected your training schedule and plans?

This was a farewell year for me. There's a lot of re-evaluation to be done. So, my team is also on that. My father is very happy because he felt in the beginning that I should not be retiring this year. So he's really happy that now the pre-season has been extended.

With loved ones:

Paes with his daughter Aiyana.

"This is the time to have meals with them (his family), interact with them and also show Aiyana how to do home training," he said.

PTI

**Second thoughts?**

My father is very happy because he felt in the beginning that I should not be retiring this year," said Paes. R. RAGU

He is obviously trying to encourage me to continue playing by saying that, "If you have this sort of skill set and that you have results already this year, you should continue. You are playing at the top of the game."

Now, that being said, I think it is very important for us as a human race always to realign ourselves with what life throws at us.

During hard times like these, what are the factors that you keep in mind while training?

I think everyone is affected differently. It is tough to generalise. The call of the day is to basically be responsible. The call of the day is to have patience and abide by the government and WHO's (World Health Organization) regulations. Those governing bodies know the actual numbers, they know the way this pandemic can flare up. I think it's very important to follow the guidelines

and be disciplined about it. Wash your hands, make sure hygiene is utmost. Make sure you have social distancing. Make sure that we keep our elderly and our young safe, that we don't subject them to any infection. I think that it is very important that it starts at home.

Any message for the fans across the country?

Apart from being responsible, apart from social distancing, it is also important for us to innovate. It's also very important to watch one's diet. Because when idleness comes around, the natural human instinct is to eat a lot. And without having that activity of either walking up and down steps, of exercising which keeps us fit, it is very important to watch how much quantities of food and drink we intake. As Indians, we love food. We love as a community to come together and eat. It is important to practice social distancing and watch our diet. ☰



Personal responsibility most important

"You have to ensure to not just stay safe yourself, but also take responsibility for not infecting anyone else," says India hockey goalkeeper P. R. Sreejesh.

UTHRA GANESAN

The COVID-19 pandemic has shut down world sports, but it has had an unexpected fallout — spare time for elite sportspersons to catch up on things that they normally struggle to do.

For P. R. Sreejesh, it is the ideal time to clear his backlog of unread books — the man is a self-confessed bibliophile who devours biographies whenever possible. Right now, the centre of attention for the Indian hockey team goalkeeper and former captain, at the Sports Authority of India Centre in Bengaluru, happens to be *The Story of my Life* by Helen Keller.

In an interview, Sreejesh says that if he had to be quarantined with anyone it would be his family. "We are away from them for so long through the year that if I am ever isolated and have nowhere to go, I would want my family with me," he says.

How is the entire situation right now in

the camp?

Here it is all normal; there is nothing exceptional. The Sports Authority of India Centre (in Bengaluru) is in total shut down for everyone except us — the hockey teams and a couple of elite athletes who have either qualified for the Olympics or trying to. Even among the centre staff, the strength has been reduced to less than half. Only those who are actually staying inside are being allowed; all other contract staff have been stopped from coming. I would say right now we are being provided the best possible facilities in the country.

Can you explain how the events have panned out since the pandemic first broke out?

See, for us, there has not been much change before and after. Since we were already in camp when it actually broke out seriously and have been here since then, the routine

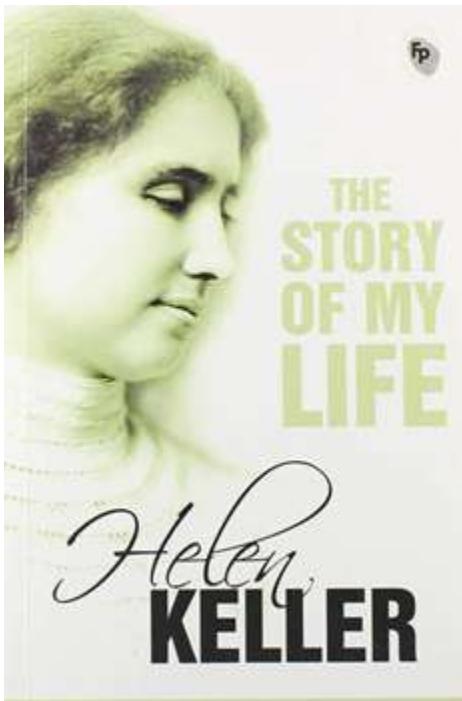
Personal message:

"Anyone who is in public or forced to meet people, try and stay home as much as possible, don't mingle much with people, use sanitisers and masks whenever you go out, always wash your hands if you touch something," said P. R. Sreejesh.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Reading list: The centre of attention for P. R. Sreejesh happens to be *The Story of my Life* by Helen Keller.

"Some of the ones I have finished include *Carry on, Warrior* by Glennon Doyle Melton, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen Covey and *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* by Yuval Noah Harari," he said.



hasn't altered much inside. We have always had certain restrictions whenever we went out even before this; now it has only become stricter. There are sanitisers everywhere, everyone is advised to wash hands often, and we are not allowed to meet the public or go outside.

We have gone outside a couple of times, but now after the lockdown, there is a small general shop about 100m away and we go only till there. If you ask me, everyone knows the intensity and seriousness of the situation and what precautions must be taken. Everyone has been informed and we are ourselves not allowing anyone to come inside or near the team.

How's the hygiene and social-distancing scene in the camp?

It is easy to stay protected because everyone is aware of the situation. Before and after every session, we wash our hands with soap, water and sanitiser. Also before and after every meal, we do it. Everyone is aware and taking great care of personal hygiene and even clothes are being washed not just with normal water but using antiseptics like Dettol. It actually feels good to be responsible.

Is it easier for someone like you who anyway spends a large part in camps away from family? How is your family

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"Profound... I can't stop thinking about this book."

—BRENÉ BROWN, author of *Daring Greatly*

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GLENNON DOYLE

#1 New York Times bestselling author of *Love Warrior*

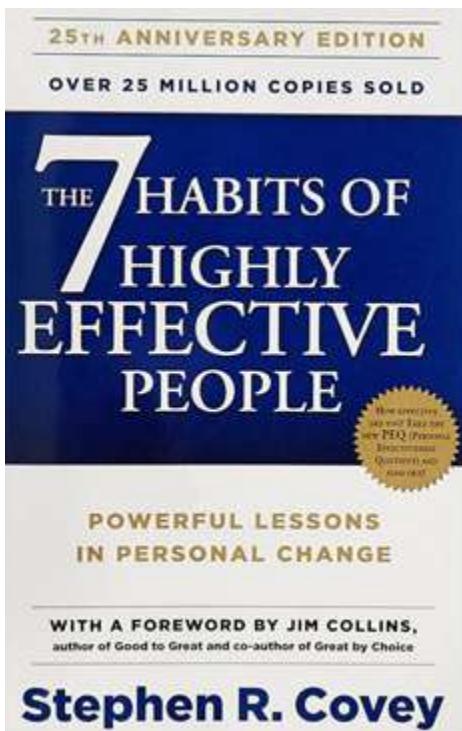
coping?

Isolation or staying away from family per se is not a very different thing; we have been doing it for years. But in the present situation, we know we are safe inside, but there is concern for families outside. When we think of them and the effects the coronavirus has had across the world, specially its impact on kids and older people, it is a concern.

My dad is over 60 and also a heart patient; my kids are three- and six-years-old, so it's even more worrying. The good thing is that so far, there have been no positive cases or even symptoms in anyone in my village or near my home. But the fact that being so far, we cannot do anything about it is worrying sometimes. Now that the borders are all closed, no trains or flights or even buses, we know we cannot go home even if we want to. All I can do is tell them to stay home and stay safe, not allow my dad to go out even to the market, not allow my kids to go out to play and stay home.

How has the training been affected? Is it the same or has it changed in this situation?

Training has not been affected. We are doing as usual thanks to SAI, all the facilities superb till today... We don't even know when we will play the next tournaments, matches, tours, anything. So we are trying to change



Stephen R. Covey

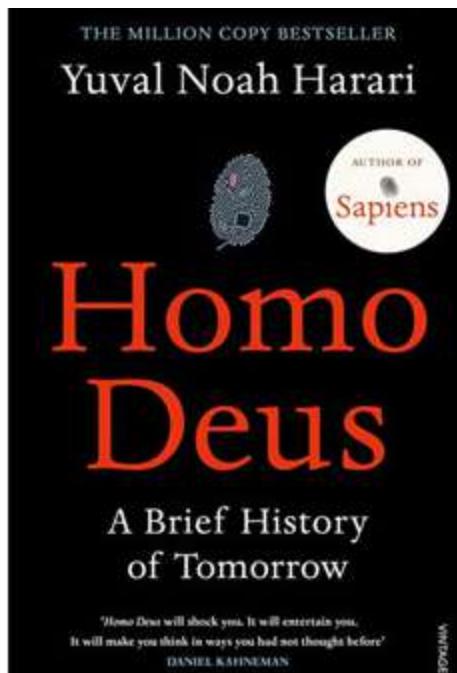
our training schedules, loads, methods and routines...

What do you do in your spare time now since you can't go out anywhere?

Actually, there is no additional spare time, unlike for others! Since our training has continued as usual and the camp is nonstop, there has been little change to our schedules. But, yes, on weekends there is some extra time on hands. Earlier we would go out for coffee or simply walk around the city, but now I am using this time to catch up on books. I have a huge collection and a backlog that I normally read on tours and during travel, but now I am doing it in camp itself. Some of the ones I have finished include *Carry on, Warrior* by Glennon Doyle Melton, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen Covey and *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* by Yuval Noah Harari. I have managed over a dozen this year so far! Then there are movies online and we have also started playing volleyball occasionally to break the monotony and routine.

If you had to be isolated or quarantined with one person, who would that be?

My family, no questions about it! You also know how much time we get to spend with family and kids and parents. We are away from them for so long through the year that



if I am ever isolated and have nowhere to go, I would want my family with me. Nothing would be better than being with them 24x7, spending time with my kids. I don't think I will ever get bored with that!

Does sport matter in these times?

Yes, it does, but not more than human life. Unless you are alive and healthy, sports will matter little. If there has to be a choice made, your health and family should come first. Nothing is worth more than that, not even sports for a professional athlete.

What's your message to the fans?

There is only one way to avoid getting the virus and stop its spread — personal hygiene and social distancing. Distance in life is very important. Anyone who is in public or forced to meet people, try and stay home as much as possible, don't mingle much with people, use sanitisers and masks whenever you go out, always wash your hands if you touch something. Taking a bath every day, even twice a day, when you come back home. That would be great!

The most important thing is to understand personal responsibility. If you think you are safe, you wouldn't be affected and that it happens to others, you are wrong. No one is superhuman in this world, none of us is exceptional. You have to ensure to not just stay safe yourself, but also take responsibility for not infecting anyone else. ☺

Isolation or staying away from family perse is not a very different thing; we have been doing it for years. But in the present situation, we know we are safe inside, but there is concern for families outside. When we think of them and the effects the coronavirus has had across the world, specially its impact on kids and older people, it is a concern.



A time to take stock!

Mithali Raj admits that it is a very difficult phase for any athlete to be in, especially when it is time to prepare for the season ahead.

V. V. SUBRAHMANYAM

It is a ‘forced break’ for many champion athletes across the world and more so for someone like the best-ever women’s cricketer from India, Mithali Raj.

And, the 37-year-old Mithali, at home for more than a week for the first time in an illustrious career spanning a stunning 21 years, is now digging deep into her treasure trove... of mementoes, trophies and India jerseys which are re-kindling memories of

Confession: Mithali Raj admits that it is a very difficult phase for any athlete to be in, especially when it is time to prepare for the season ahead.

V. V. SUBRAHMANYAM

some of her fabulous feats what with the dreaded Coronavirus forcing her stay put indoors now.

“In a way, it is a blessing in disguise as I can afford to do things which I haven’t for years like cleaning up my room and ‘discovering’ many souvenirs about which I had almost forgotten,” says Mithali in an exclusive chat with *Sportstar*.

“Yes, definitely spending time with my



niece (brother's eight-year-old daughter Anagha) being the best of all moments," she says with a big smile.

"Definitely, it is not just doing these sorts of things but also keeping fit as all gyms are also closed and I am doing some basic exercises to be in the right shape - mentally and physically - as once this virus is eradicated, we hope to be back on the field," says Mithali.

"It is also time to read some books. Normally, when I am with the Indian team I

Keeping occupied:

"It is also time to read some books. Normally, when I am with the Indian team I prefer to read fiction stories. Now I am reading non-fiction ones too," Mithali says.

V. V. SUBRAHMANYAM

prefer to read fiction stories. Now I am reading non-fiction ones too," she says.

Mithali admits that it is a very difficult phase for any athlete to be in, especially when it is time to prepare for the season ahead.

"But again, you have to understand the gravity of the situation across the world and plan your daily activity accordingly. No doubt, everything looks uncertain now as to what will happen next," she says.

"Certainly, at times, I do fear as to how



things would evolve with this dreaded virus. There is a panicky feeling for sure as to what will happen if it worsens," she says. "For, there is nothing more valuable than life and these are dangerous times for sure," she adds.

What are her impressions about this grim scenario?

"Just imagine the kind of impact it will have on the under-privileged."

"I can easily visualise the kind of challenges the leaders face. For, as the Indian team captain, there were instances when I had to put in a conscious effort to make my teammates stay calm and composed under pressure knowing fully well it is sometimes impossible to change the course of matches," Mithali explained.

"I have been following on the social media every hour the developments related to this virus and I do feel with a sense of pride that India is much better off than most of the other countries hit by it," she pointed out.

"It is the first of its kind of experience,

Proud collection:
Mithali is now digging deep into her treasure trove... of mementoes, trophies and India jerseys which are re-kindling memories of some of her fabulous feats.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

harrowing indeed, for all of us and hopefully will be the last," Mithali says.

"This is a part of life. For years, I have been used to the routine of getting up early morning, going to training sessions, coming back to relax for a couple of hours and going back again on the field. It seems it will take some time to get back to that daily regimen again," she says.

"All I can say to everyone is to understand the way the Governments - at the Centre and in the States – are facing the challenges and contribute in our own way to see an early end to this crisis," Mithali appeals.

Since she has the time now, does she watch videos of the big achievers - in sports and in other walks of life?

"Certainly not mine for sure. I have never watched my own videos. Yes, I am always keen to know how the successful ones have overcome the challenges in some of the most demanding situations. For you can always pick a few new aspects in countering your own challenges," she says.

Isn't women's cricket really upbeat after the massive response to the T-20 World Cup final in Melbourne? How was it being there in Melbourne as the ICC ambassador?

"It was an unforgettable experience. The atmosphere was unbelievable and the crowd response matched men's cricket in terms of not just attendance but the passion with which they supported the two teams - India and Australia - sporting different dresses and colours and showing their patriotism," she explains.

"But, like all other sports bodies, the ICC is forced to reschedule many events. We were supposed to play the World Cup (50 overs) qualifiers in Sri Lanka this June, then tour England this July-August. But, given the grim battle with the virus, everything will go for a toss," she feels.

On an IPL for women, Mithali feels that if at all the intention is there, this is the right time to start. "But, again this virus must have put on hold all thoughts in this regard," she adds.

But the champion cricketer suggests that the women's IPL rules should be different like allowing six foreign players instead of four (as in men's cricket) as women's cricket doesn't have too many domestic players to form a team.

"But I strongly believe you need to start somewhere and it is high time to come up with the women's IPL," she ends. ☒



All in the mind: "I can maintain my composure under any stress and not allow anxiety to influence my behaviour," says Shikhar Dhawan.

PTI

We will learn to be better human beings

Confined to his home, Shikhar Dhawan has found ways to remain active and focussed. Other than his regular exercises, he has made rapid progress in his new love – playing the flute.

VIJAY LOKAPALLY

Spirituality is the driving force behind Shikhar Dhawan being able to stand up to the challenges. His personality has seen a transformation from the time he regained his place in the Indian team, especially the sensational century on debut

against Australia in Mohali in 2013. He lost his Test spot in 2018 after the tour to England but it has not dampened his resolve to keep doing what he knows best — play cricket with a positive mind.

The lockdown in the country has helped



Philosophical: An injured Shikhar Dhawan during a practice session ahead of India's World Cup match against Afghanistan in England in 2019. "I was quick to realise that life has various phases in store for you. I was fortunate to understand all that when I was a teenager," says Dhawan. AP

Dhawan connect with himself, friends and family like never before. "It was a good decision by our Prime Minister and very important given the circumstances. We have to understand it is for the benefit of the people. We will have to be patient. Can't we give 21 days of our life to help the country recover from this outbreak? We need to control the spread of the virus and that can happen only if we follow the instructions of the authorities and the doctors," Dhawan told *Sportstar*.

How does he tackle the lockdown? "By visiting myself. By understanding myself. I have to challenge myself. I have pledged to talk sweetly, not to lose my temper. I don't raise my voice. I know my strength is this calmness that I have developed in the past few years. I can maintain my composure

under any stress and not allow anxiety to influence my behaviour."

Insisting that it can be tackled, Dhawan said, "You have to learn to interact with yourself. When I am batting in the middle, I interact with myself. You can be your best friend. I was also my best critic when I failed. I would concentrate on keeping negativity out of my system, crush the negative feelings, because you learn nothing from them."

How does he keep himself busy? "Doing little chores in the house. Training. Reading. Playing with children. Eating together. I look at this lockdown as a directive from God and nature. We have been taught a lesson. We now must learn to respect nature. You may have all the world's riches and comforts but it is nature which has the



last laugh. We all have had some harsh lessons in recent times and I am sure we all will learn to be better human beings.”

Being a cricketer, Dhawan picked up lessons in life from the sport. “I learnt to tackle hardships. Learnt to accept failures. I was quick to realise that life has various phases in store for you. I was fortunate to understand all that when I was a teenager. I could not get a place in the team as long as Viru (Sehwag) and Gautam (Gambhir) were excelling. I was busy playing Ranji Trophy and accepting that my turn had not come yet. All the while I was learning. It took me nine years after my first-class debut to get a Test cap. It made me a better cricketer actually.”

Recalling that tough period, Dhawan noted, “I loved that competition. But I was not competing. When you start competing, you also start comparing. And that leads to

jealousy and acrimony. Why compare and why to compete needlessly? I was living my dream by playing cricket and I told myself that I had to change my thinking. I felt very light and enlightened as I prepared myself for bigger challenges. I looked within and faced the world with hope. I am glad I could live my dream.”

Confined to his home, Dhawan has ways to remain active and focussed. Other than his regular exercises, he has made rapid progress in his new love — playing the flute. “I can play a melodious tune for you. I can engage you with my flute as I can with my batting (*laughs*). I take my flute lessons seriously. I also meditate without fail. My flute also keeps me lively. Spirituality has transformed me. It is a different journey. I don’t waste time in doing WhatsApp and chatting. I have begun to enjoy the nature. It keeps me positive and happy.” ☈

Enjoying the break:

A file picture of Dhawan with his family. The dashing opener keeps himself busy, doing little chores in the house, training, reading, playing with the children and eating together, during the current lockdown.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Making a point:

"Sports will be badly hit because of the impact on the economy," says Grandmaster P. Harikrishna.

RAJEEV BHATT



Sport is not important at this critical juncture

"Already, I came to know that many sponsors of not just chess alone but other disciplines too, have suffered huge losses," said Indian Grandmaster P. Harikrishna.

V. V. SUBRAHMANYAM

Grandmaster (GM) P. Harikrishna feels that the lockdown and emergencies across the world may not mean much to chess players for they normally prefer isolation to train.

But he asserts once the situation improves, it might take a lot of time for the sponsors to regroup and come back to host

sporting events.

"Already, I came to know that many sponsors of not just chess alone but other disciplines too, have suffered huge losses. With this lockdown, it is not sure how many of them can recover and how quickly. Sports will be badly hit because of the impact on the economy," says 33-year-old



Harikrishna in an exclusive chat with *Sportstar* from Prague (Czech Republic), where he has been staying since 2018 after getting married to Nadezda Stojanovic, the Serbian chess prodigy.

"Yes, we have to be optimistic about a dramatic improvement across the globe. But, again, not that easy given the Coronavirus had hit the world economy so badly," feels India's third highest-rated player after Viswanathan Anand (2753) and Vidit Gujrathi (2726).

The soft-spoken former World junior champion also felt it was strange that the Candidates Chess tournament matches in Russia happened to be one of the very few sporting events going on in the world, though it had to be cancelled subsequently mid-way after seven rounds.

"In the first instance, I felt they should not have started it. It is not that we expect something worse will happen. But, the hints were coming from across the world. Perhaps, the gravity was misunderstood," he reasoned.

"The fact is there were two Chinese players in the Candidates Matches and their families too would have been seriously worried about the developing situation. Well, if someone says that when the players didn't have a problem, what is there to debate, then I have nothing to comment." Harikrishna thinks that the minimum re-

sponsibility was to ensure the virus didn't spread.

But, the Candidates Matches also presented the Hyderabadi a first-time experience of commentating for a website.

"In the last World Championship I did comment but it was more of a summary of the day's play. Here, I had to pick the game of the day and make an in-depth analysis. Honestly, I enjoyed it thoroughly," the World No. 27 said.

"I am in touch with my game thanks to the technology available and my wife's company. But, frankly this is not the time to think of any tournaments. Sport is not important at this critical juncture when the whole world is battling the dreaded virus. I am sincerely praying that everything will be okay soon," Hari said from Prague, what is now his 'second home'.

"Fortunately, with the authorities declaring National Emergency in Prague on March 15, the situation is not as bad it is in other countries. We are still going out for a walk but those who move without masks are fined," he added.

Reflecting on what he missed the most, Hari, who has an ELO rating of 2719, says he is constantly in touch with his friends and family members across the world. "I interact with my parents daily and I am glad that the situation is not bad in India," he signed off. ☈

Second home:
Harikrishna with his wife and former Serbian chess player Nadezda Stojanovic. Hari, who is currently in Prague, says he is constantly in touch with his friends and family members.

V. V. SUBRAHMANYAM

Highs and lows of Ranji Trophy 2019-20



The 86th edition of the Ranji Trophy tournament, India's premier first-class cricket tournament, took place from December 9, 2019, to March 13, 2020. This edition saw a record 38 teams participating and in all a total of 169 matches were played. Chandigarh competed in the Ranji Trophy for the first time. This season, we saw a new Ranji Trophy champion in Saurashtra, which became the 19th team to win the competition since the first edition in the 1934-35 season. It should, however, be noted that two others sides from the same area as Saurashtra had won the Ranji title before independence — Nawanagar (in 1936-37) and Western India States (in 1943-44). Meanwhile, it was heartburn for the Bengal side. Although it has managed to win the tournament twice before in 1938-39 and 1989-90, it has now finished runner-up for a record 12th time — the most by an Indian domestic side. Vidarbha, the champion for the last two years, and 41-time winner Mumbai disappointed as they failed to reach the last eight.

A look at the highs and lows in the competition this season.

Winner: Saurashtra (maiden title)

Runner-up: Bengal (12th loss in a final)

Semifinalists: Gujarat, Karnataka

Quarterfinalists: Odisha, Andhra, Goa, Jammu and Kashmir

Highest totals

688/7 declared by Mumbai v Uttar Pradesh at Mumbai (Wankhede Stadium)

672/8 declared by Chandigarh v Manipur at Kolkata VAG

662/4 declared by Meghalaya v Mizoram at Kolkata VAG

Highest match aggregates

1,405 runs for 28 wickets between Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland at Dimapur

1,380 runs for 24 wickets between Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram at Puducherry

1,371 runs for 33 wickets between Baroda and Mumbai at Vadodara

Lowest totals

27/10 by Manipur v Meghalaya at Mangoldoi

44/10 by Maharashtra v Services at Palam, Delhi

49/10 by Tripura v Haryana at Lahli, Rohtak

Biggest victories

By wickets: 10 wickets (on 7 occasions by 7 sides)

By runs: 464 runs, Gujarat beat Goa at Valsad

By innings: Innings and 425 runs, Meghalaya beat Mizoram at Kolkata VAG

Narrowest victories

By wickets: 1 wicket (3 occasions by 3 sides)

By runs: 21 runs, Kerala beat Punjab at Thumba

Most extras conceded

73 by Madhya Pradesh v Karnataka at Shimoga

Total individual 100s

215 (includes 3 scores of 300-plus and 25 scores between 200 and 299)

Highest individual scores

307* by Taruwar Kohli for Mizoram v Arunachal Pradesh at Puducherry

303* by Manoj Tiwary for Bengal v Hyderabad at Kalyani

301* by Sarfaraz Khan for Mumbai v Uttar Pradesh at Mumbai WS

267* by Rahul Dalal for Arunachal Pradesh v Nagaland at Dimapur

254* by Sanjay Yadav for Meghalaya v Mizoram at Kolkata VAG

250 by Punit Bisht for Meghalaya v Arunachal Pradesh at Dibrugarh

100s in each innings

178 & 205* by Rahul Dalal for Arunachal Pradesh v Mizoram at Puducherry

140 & 113* by Mohd Rahamatullah for Bihar v Arunachal Pradesh at Patna

Highest run aggregate

1,340 runs by Rahul Dalal for Arunachal Pradesh in 9 matches and 17 innings

998 runs by Taruwar Kohli for Mizoram in 9 matches and 16 innings

976 runs by Punit Bisht for Meghalaya in 9 matches and 15 innings

967 runs by Paras Dogra for Puducherry in 9 matches and 13 innings

928 runs by Sarfaraz Khan for Mumbai in 6 matches and 9 innings

Highest batting average

154.66 by Sarfaraz Khan for Mumbai — 928 runs in 9 innings with 3 not outs

99.60 by Bipul Sharma for Chandigarh — 498 runs in 7 innings with 2 not outs

96.60 by Uday Kaul for Chandigarh — 483 runs in 9 innings with 4 not outs

Highest batting strike rates

164.74 by Suryakant Pradhan for Odisha — 257 runs in 156 balls in 13 innings

112.97 by Abdul Samad for Jammu and Kashmir — 592 runs in 524 balls in 17 innings

110.93 by K. Gowtham for Karnataka — 284 runs in 256 balls in 9 innings

Most fours

174 by Rahul Dalal for Arunachal Pradesh in 9 matches and 17 innings

138 fours by Punit Bisht for Meghalaya in 9 matches and 15 innings

127 fours by Taruwar Kohli for Mizoram in 9 matches and 16 innings

Most sixes

36 sixes by Abdul Samad for Jammu and Kashmir in 10 matches and 17 innings

26 sixes by Sanjay Yadav for Meghalaya in 9 matches in 14 innings

24 sixes by Ankit Kaushik for Chandigarh in 9 matches in 8 innings

Most individual 100s

4 by Harpreet Singh for Chhattisgarh in 8 matches and 11 innings

4 by Paras Dogra for Puducherry in 9 matches and 13 innings

4 by Amit Verma for Goa in 10 matches and in 14 innings

4 by Mohd Rahmatullah for Bihar in 9 matches and 15 innings

4 by KB Pawan for Mizoram in 9 matches and 16 innings

4 by Arpit Vasavada for Saurashtra in 10 matches and 16 innings

4 by Rahul Dalal for Arunachal Pradesh in 9 matches and 17 innings

Most 50-plus scores

9 by Rahul Dalal for Arunachal Pradesh in 9 matches and 17 innings

8 by Amit Verma for Goa in 10 matches and in 14 innings

8 by Punit Bisht for Meghalaya in 9 matches and 15 innings

8 by Taruwar Kohli for Mizoram in 9 matches and 16 innings

Most 50s (50-99 runs)

7 by Devdutt Padikkal for Karnataka in 10 matches and 19 innings

6 by Venkatesh Iyer for Madhya Pradesh in 7 matches and 11 innings

6 by Shams Mulani for Mumbai in 8 matches and 11 innings

6 by Punit Bisht for Meghalaya in 9 matches and 15 innings

Most ducks

7 by Bobby Zothansanga for Mizoram in 9 matches and 15 innings

6 by Lalbiakvela L Guite for Mizoram in 9 matches and 15 innings

6 by Bishworjit Singh for Manipur in 9 matches and 17 innings

**Rahul Dalal...**

highest run-aggregagate – 1340 runs in nine matches and 17 innings for Arunachal Pradesh.

AKHILESH KUMAR

Most sixes in an innings

13 by Sanjay Yadav for Meghalaya v Mizoram at Kolkata VAG

13 by Ankit Kaushik for Chandigarh v Mizoram at IT Park, Chandigarh

11 by Abdul Samad for Jammu and Kashmir v Jharkhand at Ranchi

11 by Paras Dogra for Puducherry v Goa at Puducherry

Highest strike rate in an innings

228.57 (64 in 28 balls) by Suryakant Pradhan for Odisha v Services at Cuttack (DRIEMS)

170.66 (128 in 75 balls) by Abdul Samad for Jammu and Kashmir v Jharkhand at Ranchi

154.41 (105* in 68 balls) by Nitish Rana for Delhi v Vidarbha at Delhi FSK

Most wickets

67 wickets by Jaydev Unadkat for Saurashtra in 10 matches and 16 innings

55 wickets by Sanjay Yadav for Meghalaya in 9 matches and 15 innings

52 wickets by Harshal Patel for Haryana in 9 matches and 17 innings

50 wickets by Diwesh Pathania for Services in 9 matches in 17 innings

49 wickets by MB Murasingh for Tripura in 9

matches and 15 innings

49 wickets by Ashutosh Aman for Bihar in 9 matches and 16 innings

49 wickets by Ishwar Chaudhury for Sikkim in 9 matches and 16 innings

Most five-wicket hauls

7 by Jaydev Unadkat for Saurashtra in 10 matches and 16 innings

6 by Ishwar Chaudhury for Sikkim in 9 matches and 16 innings

5 by Saurabh Kumar for Uttar Pradesh in 8 matches and 14 innings

5 by Sanjay Yadav for Meghalaya in 9 matches and 15 innings

5 Ashutosh Aman for Bihar in 9 matches and 16 innings

Most 10-wicket hauls

3 by Sanjay Yadav for Meghalaya in 9 matches and 15 innings

3 Jaydev Unadkat for Saurashtra in 10 matches and 16 innings

2 Saurabh Kumar for Uttar Pradesh in 8 matches and 14 innings

Total five-wicket hauls

233 (includes one nine-wicket haul, four eight-wicket hauls, 28 seven-wicket hauls,

62 six-wicket hauls, 138 five-wicket hauls)
Best bowling in an innings



9/52 by Sanjay Yadav for Meghalaya v Nagaland at Dimapur

8/22 by Rex R. Singh for Manipur v Mizoram at Kolkata VAG

8/31 by Sanjay Yadav for Meghalaya v Puducherry at Mangaldoi

8/56 by Lalbiakvela L. Guite for Mizoram v Sikkim at Bhubaneswar (KIIT)

8/60 by K. Gowtham for Karnataka v Tamil Nadu at Dindigul

Total 10-wicket match hauls

33 (includes one 14-wicket haul, two 13-wicket hauls, four 12-wicket hauls, eight 11-wicket hauls, 18 10-wicket hauls)

Best bowling in a match

14/170 by K. Gowtham for Karnataka v Tamil Nadu at Dindigul

13/107 by Imliwati Lemtur for Nagaland v Meghalaya at Dimapur

13/112 by Sanjay Yadav for Meghalaya v Nagaland at Dimapur

Hat-tricks

Ashith Sanganakal (**4/5**) for Puducherry v Meghalaya at Mangaldoi

Shahbaz Ahmed (**4/26**) for Bengal v Hyderabad at Kalyani

Ravi Yadav (**5/61**) for Madhya Pradesh v Uttar Pradesh at Indore

Siddarth Kaul (**5/24**) for Punjab Andhra at Patiala

Note: Ravi Yadav took a hat-trick in his every first over on debut.

Best all-round performance

241* and 5/60 by Ajay Mandal for Chhattisgarh v Uttarakhand at Raipur

113, 55 and 6/52 by Taruwar Kohli for Mizoram v Sikkim at Bhubaneshwar (KIITG)

Best all-round performance in the same innings

122* & **6/71** by Amit Verma for Goa v Arunachal Pradesh at Porvorim

200* & **5/19** by Gurinder Singh for Chandigarh v Manipur at Kolkata VAG

148 & **5/39** by Amit Verma for Goa v Mizoram at Kolkata CCFG

Best all-rounders

848 runs and 43 wickets by Amit Verma for Goa in 10 matches

603 runs and 55 wickets by Sanjay Yadav for Meghalaya in 9 matches

598 runs and 49 wickets by M. B. Murasingh for Tripura in 9 matches

673 runs and 35 wickets by Iqbal Abdulla for Sikkim in 9 matches

509 runs and 35 wickets by Shahbaz Ahmed

Jayadev Unadkat...

most wickets – 67, in 10 matches and 16 innings for Saurashtra.

SUDHAKARA JAIN



The Honourable Supreme Court has given an excellent opportunity by its mandate for an Indian Cricketers' Association and having two members of that association on the Apex Council of the Board of Control for Cricket in India. THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY

Visions... no lockdown!

In these dark times, it is a terrific chance for the nascent Indian Cricketers' Association to show that it is the one that will look after the brotherhood.

The unprecedented lockdown throughout most of the sporting world has thrown the international sporting calendar in disarray. It is at this time that one realises that sport is just a tiny part of the universe and there's much more to life than winning and losing a sporting encounter. Winning the battle to live is far more crucial than anything else.

This lockdown not only provides us the chance to take a step back and reflect on our lives, careers and possibilities, but also gives us 'my time,' which has been a luxury in the rush, rush pattern of our existence.

It is also a time where we get the chance to appreciate all those who help make our lives easier with their presence, be it relatives, elders, family and extended family, friends, staff or, most importantly, public workers, whose work is finally being recognised and acknowledged.

Even as we individually get the time to reboot ourselves, it's also a wonderful opportunity for organisations to do an honest introspection and focus on areas where they can get better.

Many such associations are coming to the aid of their members and fraternity in these



dark times and this is a terrific chance for a nascent one like the Indian Cricketers' Association to show that it is the one that will look after the brotherhood. It's early days of course but it would be wonderful if they can draw a road map for the future and tell the members what their vision is. This can be done quite easily by asking the members online what they would want. Of course, not every want can be fulfilled, but needs can certainly be met and that is what the effort should always strive for.

The focus on getting an office space seems trivial now that we know, thanks to the lockdown, that we all can work from home too. Plans must be made to be independent of the BCCI funding to prevent the association from becoming beholden to the board. If it really wants to be the voice of the cricketers in the country then it must do so standing on its own legs and not propped up by board funds.

There will be many who will come forward

and help, but most importantly the member has to take the first step by making a contribution by way of a membership fee. Not only will regular funds be coming in then, the member too will feel an ownership of the association and take active interest in it. Many a member today perhaps has no source of income with the current lockdown and he would be looking to the association for assistance and guidance at this time. This is where funds raised will come in handy.

There is plenty of work ahead if it is going to be an association that players will be lining up to be a part of and this is where the vision statement and steps taken towards fulfilling that will be critical. The Honourable Supreme Court has given an excellent opportunity by its mandate for an Indian Cricketers' Association and having two members of that association on the Apex Council of the BCCI. The next year or so will show us whether that has made a difference for the cricketing community or whether it is just a pipe dream. ☈

Plans must be made to be independent of the BCCI funding to prevent the Indian Cricketers' Association from becoming beholden to the board. AFP



10 tennis things you can do during the coronavirus crisis

Watch great tennis matches. Play trivia games and do tennis quizzes with your family, talk about your dreams with your family and friends, and more...



"In adversity, remember to keep an even mind." — Horace.

"Friendship makes prosperity more shining and lessens adversity by dividing and sharing it." — Cicero.

"Let me embrace thee, sour adversity, for wise men say it is the wisest course." — William Shakespeare.

Our ability to adapt will be tested during the rapidly changing coronavirus pandemic. We don't know how long this still mysterious virus will last or how severe its effects will be. But tennis players have surmounted daunting challenges before, such as two World Wars, natural disasters, economic depressions and political upheaval.

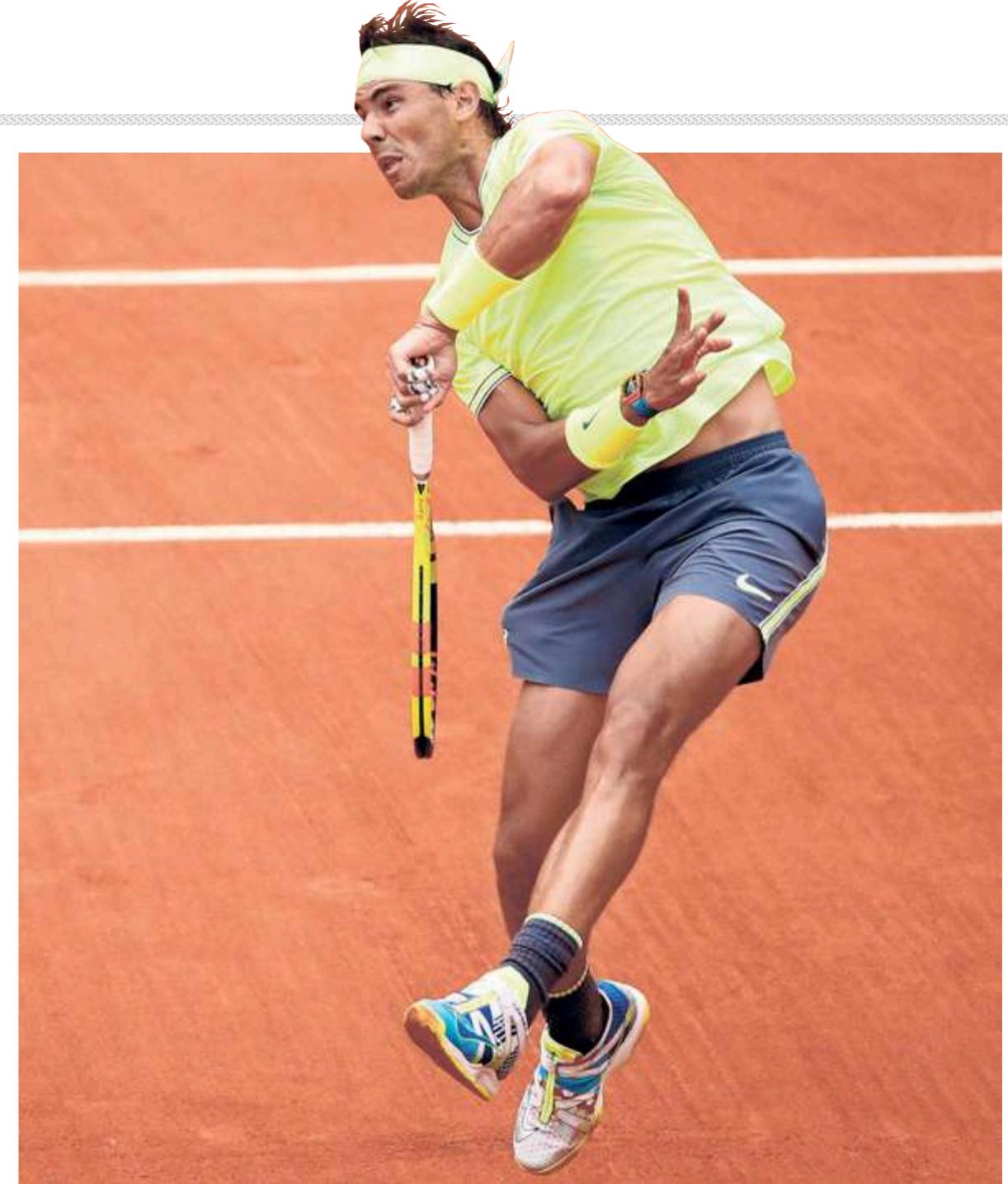
With information, ingenuity and planning, you can make the best of this Brave New World of infectious disease while complying with your country's guidelines to protect yourself and others against COVID-19.

Here are some suggestions to help make life bearable and even enjoyable.

Early action: Empty stands at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden on March 8. The BNP Paribas Open was the first big tennis tournament to be cancelled because of a public health emergency when a case of coronavirus was confirmed in the area.
GETTY IMAGES

Watch great tennis matches. If you're going through a painful withdrawal caused by the suspension of pro tournaments, you can watch all or parts of championship matches on the Internet with a few clicks. If you've taped them over the years, dig into your video library and select your favourite players competing in their most glorious matches. And if your nation is fortunate to have a tennis channel or sports channel that features tennis, check its TV schedule for replays of the greatest matches in the recent and distant past.

Read a tennis book. If you enjoy humour and nostalgia, you'll love *A Handful of Summers*, a classic by Gordon Forbes. If memoirs are your favourite genre, you can't beat *OPEN*, a candid page turner by Andre Agassi. Hardcore tennis fans will relish *Short Circuit*, a controversial exposé by muckraker Michael Mewshaw. Players itching to improve their games will find *Absolute Tennis*, an instruction book by Marty Smith, brimming with valuable insights and top-



notch advice. *The Pros: The Forgotten Era of Tennis* by Peter Underwood will engross history buffs interested in the unsung, outcast pro champions before Open tennis arrived in 1968. Reading old tennis magazines, especially *World Tennis* and *Tennis Week*, can also bring back fond memories of happier times.

Phone your tennis friends. That will reduce their and your social isolation. Ask them

Clay court king: Will rescheduling the French Open, starting September 20, affect Rafael Nadal's chances of winning a mind-blowing 13th title?
GETTY IMAGES

how they're dealing with the suspension of tournaments. And just talk tennis with them. Any topic. The conversation might focus on recent practice matches, how your or their various injuries are healing, other area players, or reminiscences of tournaments past. You might even speculate about the effects of the coronavirus crisis on the tennis world. For example, how will the rescheduled French



Open, starting September 20, affect clay court king Rafael Nadal's chances of winning a mind-blowing 13th title?

Play trivia games and do tennis quizzes with your family. You can get the games going with these challenging and fun questions. Do you know which 1970s and 2000s tennis champions were once engaged but did not marry? Or which 1930s female star became a heroic American spy during World War II? Or which all-time great won far fewer Grand

Tennis trivia:
Alice Marble, the 1930s female star, became a heroic American spy during World War II.

THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY

Slam titles than his wife? If you have a smarty pants in your family, ask him to tell you the four different scoring system rules for deciding set tiebreakers at Grand Slam tournaments and the name of the tennis gold medallist at the first Olympic Games.

If you suddenly have more free time, do volunteer work. If you're knowledgeable about technique and tactics, ask a local teaching pro if she needs an assistant. Volunteer for a committee or two at a nearby tennis



club or tennis centre. You may be able to help with its outreach programme, court maintenance, social media or website – as long as the work does not require face-to-face interactions.

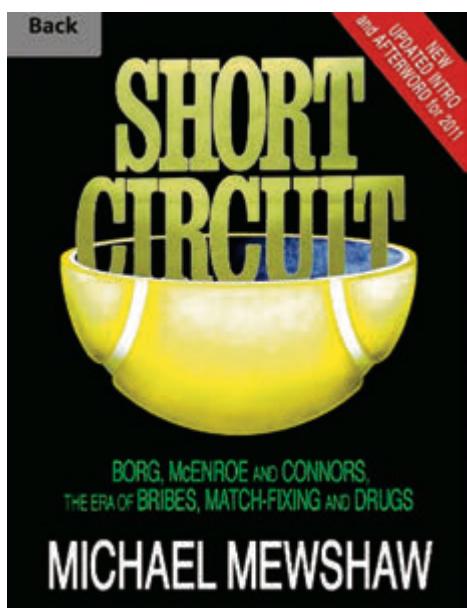
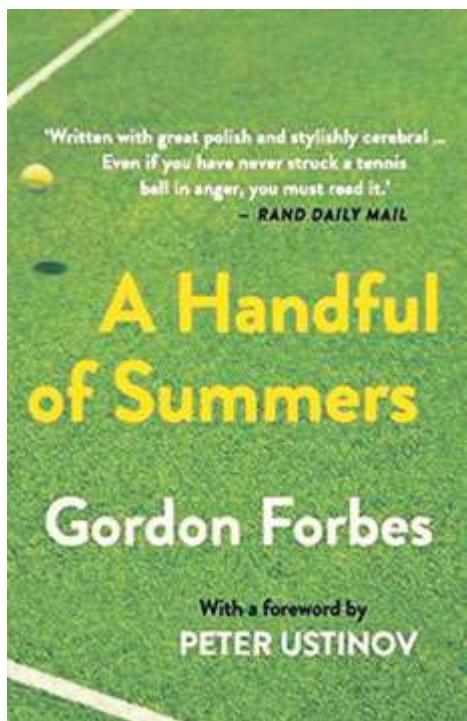
Play tennis, especially outdoors. Un-crowded outdoor space is generally low-risk, and the fresh air, sunlight and exercise will boost your immune system. Have fun, but also take the necessary precautions to avoid being exposed and exposing others to the

Tennis movies: The plot of the film *Battle of the Sexes* is loosely on a 1973 exhibition match in which Billie Jean King (right) defeated Bobby Riggs.
THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY



coronavirus. First, observe the “social distancing” rule of staying 6ft away from everyone else, including your doubles partner. Second, if you cough or sneeze, be sure to cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or the inside of your elbow. Third, wash your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitiser before you play and, if possible, after each set. Fourth, do not touch your face, and do not shake hands, high-five or hug. Fifth, and very importantly, the Centres for Disease

VANTAGE POINT

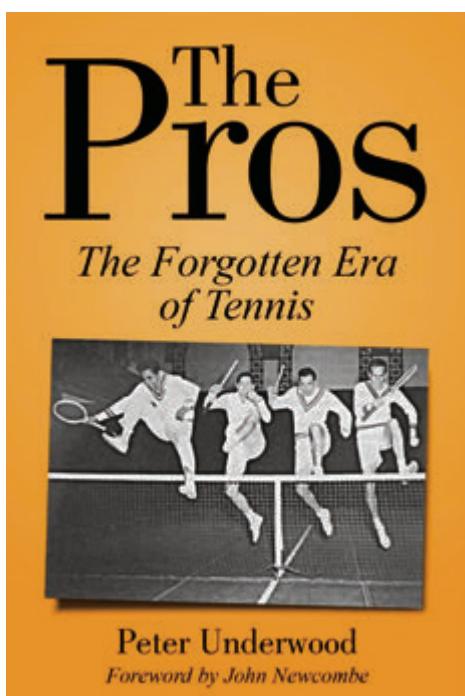
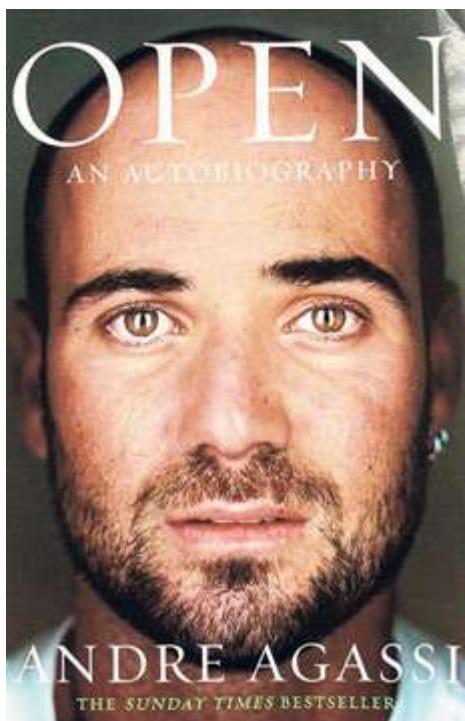


Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends, "If you are sick with COVID-19 or think you might have it, stay in touch with your doctor. Call before you get medical care. Be sure to get care if you feel worse or you think it is an emergency."

If you can't play on a given day, increase your off-court training. Hitting against a wall keeps your ground strokes grooved and your timing sharp. For hand-eye coordination, stand 20ft away from your partner and simul-

Tennis reads:

(Clockwise from left) If you enjoy humour and nostalgia, you'll love *A Handful of Summers*, a classic by Gordon Forbes. If memoirs are your favourite genre, you can't beat *OPEN*, a candid page turner by Andre Agassi. *The Pros: The Forgotten Era of Tennis* by Peter Underwood will engross history buffs interested in the unsung, outcast pro champions before Open tennis arrived in 1968. Hardcore tennis fans will relish *Short Circuit*, a controversial exposé by muckraker Michael Mewshaw.



Peter Underwood
Foreword by John Newcombe

taneously throw a tennis ball at each other. To toughen the drill, gradually move closer to each other and throw faster and to different spots. You can also learn how to juggle tennis balls. To maintain your speed and agility, sprint 10, 20 and 30ft, while alternating the direction laterally, diagonally, backward and forward. And don't forget to do stretching



exercises to improve your flexibility.

Talk about your dreams with your family and friends. If you want to make your high school, college or club team, discuss how you plan to do it. The same goes for winning a coveted title, achieving a top-10 ranking, or improving a weak stroke in your otherwise solid game.

The dream could involve serving in a tennis organisation, whether it be paid or volunteer work. For inspiration, remember what the great writer John Updike said: "Dreams come true. Without that possibility, nature would not incite us to have them."

Lighten up! A sense of humour is more important now than ever. If you have young children, visit <https://www.scarymommy.com/tennis-jokes/> for tennis jokes. They can also have fun impersonating the mannerisms of their favourite stars, such as Rafa fist-pumping and Serena yelling "Come on!" after they win big points. Watch a funny tennis movie, such as *Battle of the Sexes*, *Pat and Mike* or *Break Point*. Laughter is the best medicine. It's no joke. According to the Mayo Clinic, laughter relieves stress, improves

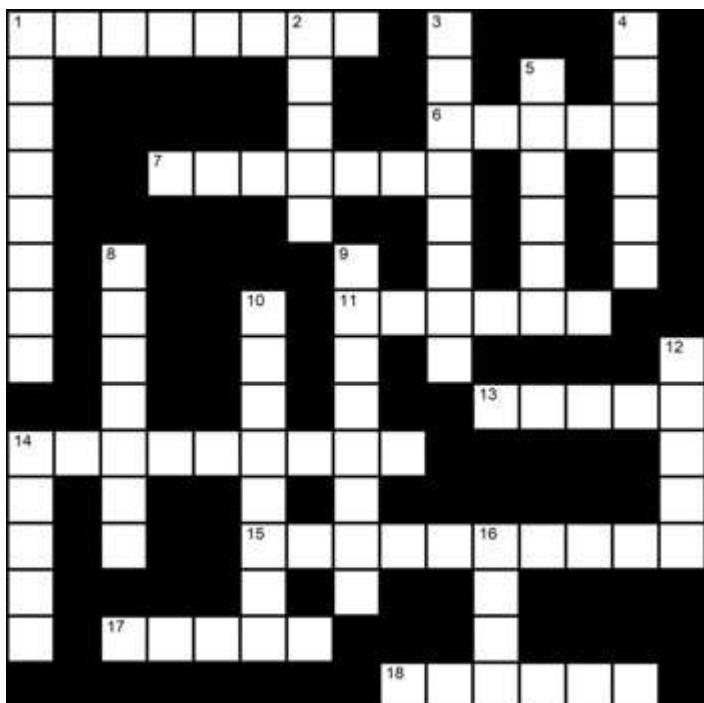
Lighten up! Young children can have fun impersonating the mannerisms of their favourite stars, such as Serena Williams yelling "Come on!" after winning big points. AP

your immune system, stimulates many organs and brightens your mood.

Stay informed. That's your best defence against this highly contagious disease. In an era of unprecedented misinformation, you can find valuable information and authoritative advice at these highly respected health and medical organisations: the World Health Organisation (<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>), the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>), the National Institutes of Health (<https://www.nih.gov/health-information/coronavirus>), Johns Hopkins Medicine (<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/coronavirus>), the Mayo Clinic (<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/coronavirus/symptoms-causes>), the Cleveland Clinic (<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/landing/preparing-for-coronavirus>).

We are all in this pandemic together. So, as Ben Franklin said after signing the American Declaration of Independence in 1776, "We must all hang together or most assuredly we will all hang separately." ☈

CROSSWORD SRIRAM SRINIVASAN



SOLUTION TO LAST FORTNIGHT'S CROSSWORD

ACROSS

- 1 Ignacio Trelles Campos, who coached Mexico at three World Cups, was popularly called by this name. (3,5)
- 6 Goalkeeper-captain for Bayern Munich and Germany. (5)

7 Sport that's referred to as 'chess on ice.' (7)

11 The cricket coach, nicknamed 'Alfie' and 'JL.' (6)

13 The country Hend Zaza, a 11-year-old table tennis player who has qualified for Tokyo Olympics, is from. (5)

14 They are called the unofficial 12th man of the English cricket team. (5,4)

15 Former India captain who leads Tamil Thalaivas. (4,6)

17 He plays for South Africa,

Dolphins, Multan Sultans, Guyana Amazon Warriors, Chennai Super Kings, and Surrey in T20s. (5)

18 Twice unified heavyweight champion, Anthony Oluwafemi Olaseni ... (6)

DOWN

1 It's sometimes referred to as the 'World Cup of tennis.' (5,3)

2 The women's T20 World Cup's player of the final, Alyssa ... (5)

3 The National Hockey League's team representing Pittsburgh. (8)

4 Juventus has come out on top of this most number of times. (5,1)

5 He is between Warne and Anderson in the list of bowlers with most Test wickets. (6)

8 The word 'Pistol' was prefixed to

his first name. His serves were so powerful. (7)

9 The umpire who broke Steve Bucknor's record for Test appearances. (5,3)

10 The Sarusajai Stadium is in this Indian city. (8)

12 Rodney George ... was number 1 in his sport between 1964 and 1970. (5)

14 Carlsen and Humpy are the current champions in this form of chess. (5)

16 The Formula One team owned by Gene ... (4)

Pin counters pin

by C.G.S.Narayanan

In the 9th World Chess Compositions Tournament the theme set for the three-move section was duel between a black and a white piece. In contrast it was duel between white and black with like motif in the next edition. I have chosen three problems from 10th WCCT where the black's defensive motif and the white's response are of the same tactical nature- here the pin versus pin.

Three different black defences pin the white rook g5 which threatens 2.Rg4+Kf5 3.Qg6 after the key **1.Qc6!** and white in turn pins the black piece which pinned WRg5 in the three variations.

C.G.S.Narayanan

8th-9th place 10 WCCT 2016-17



Mate in three moves

- 1...R(7)xe5 2.Bd5 any 3.Ne6
(2...Qxd8 3.Nd5)
- 1....R(3)xe5 2.Qd6 any 3.e3
(2...Bxe2 3.Nxe2)
- 1...Qxe5 2.Qc7 any 3.Nd5
(2...Rxd7 3.Ne6)

There is an additional pinmate in each variation. 'One of the heaviest motives for execution, the direct pinning, is shown in three variations; those by WQ are nicely differentiated' observed Croatia, one of the judging countries.

Mikhail Khramtsevich
Victor Zaitsev (Belarus)
8th -9th place !0WCCT 2016-17



Mate in three moves

The two defences on d4 lead to reversal of mates from try to key

- 1.Rgg6! (2.Rd6+cxd6 3.Rxd6)
1...Bxd4 2.Nf2 A (3.Bxe4)
- 1....Qxd4 2.Nc5 B (3.Bxe4)

But fails to 1...Qb8!

Key 1.Rc2! (2.Rxd6+cxd6 3.Nf6

- 1...Bxd4 2.Nc5 B

- 1...Qxd4 2.Nf2 A

In the problem for solving also surprisingly it is the WR which is pinned by black, if it is any clue to solving.

Vasyl Kryzhanivskyi
Mikahil Marandyuk (Ukraine)
10th-12th place 10 WCCT 2016-17



Mate in three moves

Solution to problem for solving in the article 'Same square mechanism':-

Key 1.Qb7! (2.Qf3+ Kxe5 3.Bf6)

Readers may send in their queries to
cgsnarayanan@hotmail.com

P. K. Banerjee during a practice session in 1961. THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY



Banerjee of the banner headlines

AMITABHA DAS SHARMA

P.K. Banerjee's 'vocal tonic' was a household word. It was his unparalleled ability to motivate the players with a careful selection of words laced with metaphors and anecdotes.

Pradip Kumar Banerjee, one of the greatest footballers to have ever played for India, passed away recently after a brief fight with age-related illness. He was 83 and left behind two daughters and a legion of admirers. Playing in an era that is embellished in the history of Indian football as the golden period, P.K (as he was popularly known), was a colossus with his multi-faceted talents.

His position is incomparable in the history of Indian football as he enriched the sport as a player, coach, administrator and commentator. The acknowledgment of his unparalleled accomplishments came in the form of the Centennial Order of Merit (year 2004) by which the world governing body of football, FIFA, recognised him as the greatest Indian footballer of the 20th century. The Arjuna Award, which he received as the first footballer in the very year it was instituted (1961), and the Padma Shri (1990) are two other cherished trophies.

What made P.K. a legend was his larger

than life stature, both as a footballer and a coach. For many of his peers and even players of a later generation, P.K. belonged to that realm of excellence that very few footballers in the country could match. "He was a great man, a great footballer and a great coach. I got name and fame because of him. He was like my godfather. P.K. Banerjee was such an inspiration for players. His vocal tonic and tactical acumen were great stuff," Shyam Thapa, one of the finest forwards to have played for the country, says in his tribute.

At a time when football was mostly played with the five-forward system, P.K. excelled both as a right winger and a centre forward, showing a rare disposition of speed, skill and power. His worth can be gauged from the fact that he scored 65 goals while turning out in national colours in 84 matches.

Showing his talent quite early in age, P.K. made his Santosh Trophy debut for Bihar at the age of 15. Born on June 23, 1936,



in the north Bengal town of Jalpaiguri, he completed his early education in the local school before moving to Jamshedpur to pursue further education. Scouts from the Kolkata (then Calcutta) clubs took note of his precocious talent as he turned out for Bihar and he soon made his way to the "Maidan" to start his club career with Aryan in 1954. With club football offering very little in terms of remuneration in a purely amateurish setup at that time, P.K. opted to take a job in Eastern Railway. As the eldest among seven siblings, earning a livelihood was the primary concern, but P.K. never allowed that to overshadow his passion, which was football. After he joined, the railway team made its way up the rungs of the famed Calcutta Football League and won the title in 1958!

That was the first time any team outside the Big Three – Mohun Bagan, East Bengal and Mohammedan Sporting – had won the CFL title. And P.K. made the most notable contribution in the rise of Eastern Railway.

"He was the heartbeat of the players and the supporters. He was knowledgeable about the sport and a good psychologist who understood each and every player well. He communicated well and knew how to motivate the players individually. He was success-

ful because of his man-management skills," says one of the finest defenders of the country, Manoranjan Bhattacharya, about his football guru.

Soon P.K. was part of the national team. And here again he was a pioneer, being picked despite being a name outside the Big Three of Calcutta football. He earned the first national cap at the age of just 19 when he played the Quadrangular Tournament in Dhaka in 1955 and was a part of the Indian team at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics. India beat host Australia 4-2 in the quarterfinals and P.K. figured prominently in the win, assisting Neville DeSouza, who scored a hat-trick, and J. Krishnaswamy. This was indeed one of the most memorable chapters in Indian football. India finished fourth in Melbourne, which still is considered as the best performance by the country on the world stage.

India's next Olympics participation in 1960 (Rome) saw P.K. as the captain and he made it memorable by scoring the equaliser to hold France 1-1.

"I was the captain of the Indian team in the Melbourne Olympics in 1956 and P.K. was the right-wing player. After that the Indian team toured Malaysia, Hong Kong, Singapore, Burma, Thailand, Indonesia and

With P. K. Banerjee as the coach, India won the bronze in the Bangkok Asian Games in 1970, the last time that the country has won a football medal at the event. He was also the coach when India participated in the Tehran (1974), Delhi (1982) and Seoul (1986) Asian Games. THE HINDU
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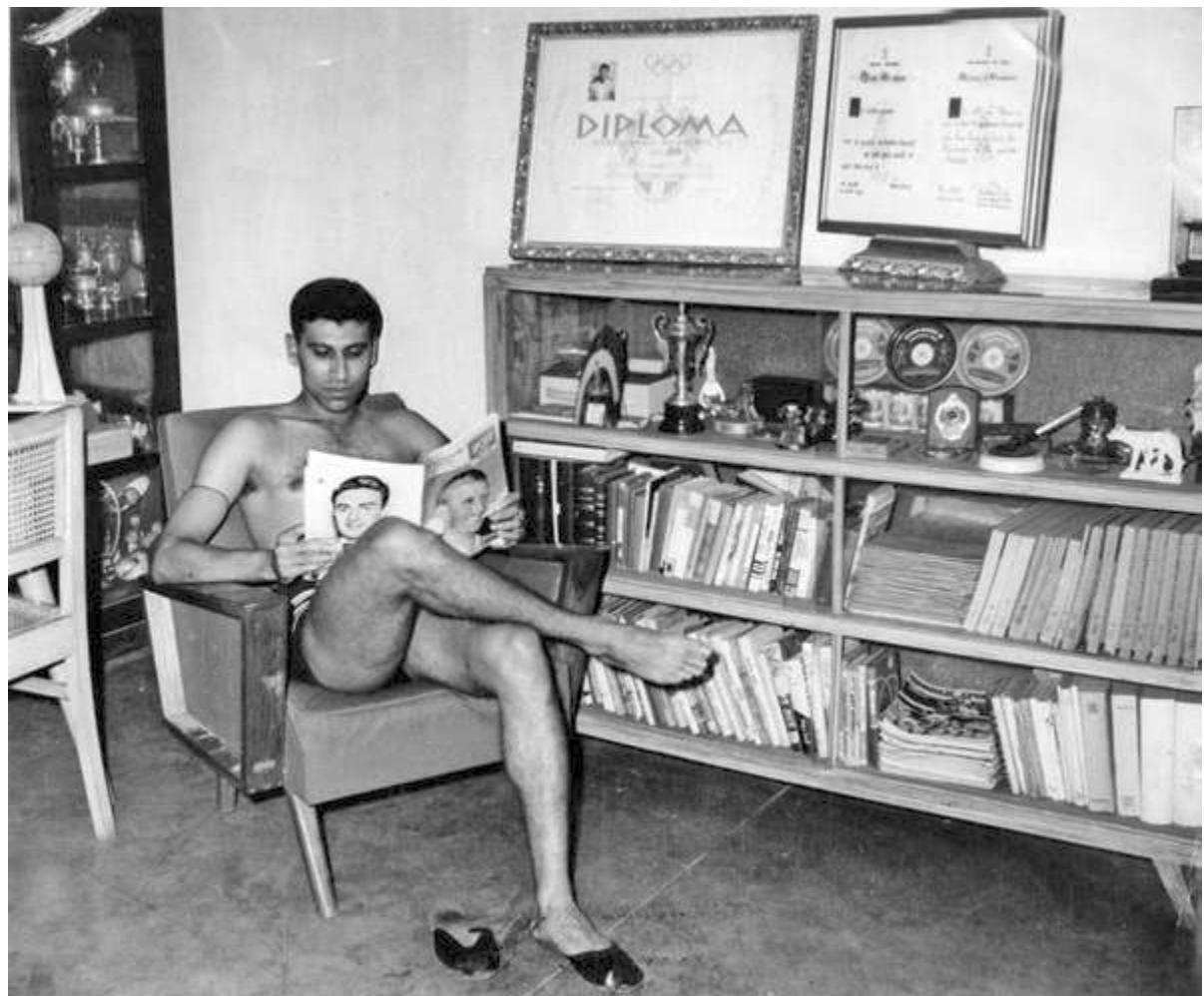


Photo shows P. K. Banerjee relaxing amidst books. He shows a preference for sports magazines particularly *Sport & Pastime*. THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY

other places, where we got very good results. We have spent so many glorious hours together. With P.K.'s death all those memories are flooding back. He was always full of life and I remember him as a positive player who combined speed and a great knack for scoring," says his first India team captain Samar (Badru) Banerjee.

The 'failure' in the Rome Olympics was soon forgotten as India became the best in the continental competition, picking up the gold in the 1962 Jakarta Asian Games. This remains one of the most memorable achievements for P.K. as India beat the formidable South Korea 2-1 in the final in front of a consistently booing crowd. Jarnail Singh and P.K. scored one apiece to down the South Koreans as India rose to the top in the continent. P.K. had also played in the 1958 and 1966 Asian Games.

Banerjee's international career ran for a considerable period as he also represented India on three occasions in the Merdeka Cup

in Kuala Lumpur. Here India won silver in 1959 and 1964 and the bronze in 1965. After this, P.K. announced the end of his playing days in 1967.

P.K. then started preparing himself for a coaching job, which soon became a reality when he was asked to shepherd the national team. Under his stewardship India won the bronze in the Bangkok Asian Games in 1970, the last time that the country has won a football medal at the event. He was also the coach when India participated in the Tehran (1974), Delhi (1982) and Seoul (1986) Asian Games.

P.K. was a great player. But he was even greater as a coach. He started his club coaching career with a bang when he was announced the coach of East Bengal in 1972. He found success immediately, winning five trophies for the team in his first year, and repeated the feat in the very next season. He also became extremely popular with his fantastic game-reading ability and excel-



Banerjee with his family members.

THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY

lent man-management skills.

Just as he brought success to East Bengal, he also managed to take a relatively unknown side like Bata to the top division of the Calcutta (Football) League.

East Bengal's traditional rival Mohun Bagan struck a gold mine in 1976 when P.K. became its coach. "After he took over the reins of Mohun Bagan in 1976, we won five trophies. Nobody understood the game better than P.K. Banerjee. On several occasions he made me play as a forward. His coaching duel with Amal Dutta is a great part of Indian football history. While Amal *da* was a master of formations and tactics, Pradip *da* used to strategise according to the way the opponent team played and was very successful," says another of P.K.'s famous pupils, the great Mohun Bagan defender Subrata Bhattacharya.

By this time P.K.'s 'vocal tonic' had become a household word. It was his unparalleled ability to motivate the players with a careful selection of words laced with metaphors and anecdotes.

East Bengal, where he spent a great part of his coaching career, won around 30 trophies under P.K.'s charge.

He also has the credit of getting the best out of some of the biggest names of Indian football like Mohammad Habib, Akbar, Surojit Sengupta, Subhash Bhowmick, Subrata Bhattacharya, Shyam Thapa, Chima Okorie and Manoranjan Bhattacharya.

The passing away of P.K. has created a void that can hardly be filled. ☰

SPORTOON



Isolation: A man plays basketball in an empty VOC Park Corporation Sports Complex court in Coimbatore on March 27, 2020, during the third day of the 21-day nationwide lockdown. Sporting activities have come to a standstill owing to the coronavirus pandemic. M. PERIASAMY



Fitness testing: bane or boon?

Testing athletes and tracking those test results over time is fundamental to effecting a successful strength-and-conditioning programme that is valid for your sport and skill.

What is fitness testing?

Fitness testing is simply a way of taking measurements of the body and its responses to exercise stimuli. This helps in identifying what component of fitness needs to improve, or whether the current level of the body's response to a challenging scenario can be time- or distance-bound depending on the sport and skill.

Different sports need different components of testing and some crossover happens in testing for the same component of the energy system. For example, a 40m sprint or pro-agility testing or countermovement jumps or even an explosive power test. These tests are done in various sports cutting across different skill sets, too.

Why testing?

Fitness testing is an intrinsic factor in every level of sports from youth, recreational exercisers to professional athletes.

- ❖ Data collection for decision-making processes and setting up new goals.

- ❖ Each athlete's baseline measurements from the starting point in his or her career and the current level of fitness.

- ❖ It helps coaches make decisions to include or exclude elements from the plan for the team depending on the current status and also long-term potential.

- ❖ Talent identification for long-term athletic development (LTAD) in any sport.

- ❖ Huge data collection for varied ethnic groups, skills, genetic make-up and lifestyle differences. It can help derive a proper long-term solution for the performance increment domain.

- ❖ Injury prevention and cure is an important factor through fitness testing.

- ❖ Movement mechanics analysis and posture control of each individual can be inferred according to each sport's requirements.

- ❖ Specific components of fitness to generic competence can be analysed through specialised testing protocols.

- ❖ Prediction of likely injuries due to improper physiological mechanics can be determined.

- ❖ How training variables can be tweaked to get the

best desired results in the future.

- ❖ It's an evaluation process for strength-and-conditioning coaches on whether their periodised plan is working or not.

- ❖ Finally, to know where each athlete's current level of overall fitness matches the individual's or team's success.

Dos for conducting fitness testing

1. Prepare the athletes with proper warm-up and hydration before the tests are conducted.

2. Reliability and repeatability of designated tests are of great importance for proper reading and data collection.

3. It is totally imperative that the chosen tests, equipment used, coaches administering them and the athlete being tested are all prepared and follow specific guidelines to ensure the validity and reliability of the data collected.

4. Testing should start with non-fatiguing tests such as anthropometric measurements followed by power, speed, strength, muscle endurance and finishing with aerobic activities.

5. All testing equipment should be correctly calibrated and the current environment should be checked thoroughly, thus enabling the testing battery to run without any hitch.

6. All tests should be done with proper communication well ahead with the athletes and the selection and sequencing of the tests explained depending on the physiological and biomechanical demands for each sport or skill.

7. Retesting should be done on the same protocols as done previously for correct result and data collection. Small errors can make huge differences in the readings and results.

8. Athletes need to be given the proper information and time frame for preparation of the tests. Adherence to proper scientific protocols is critical for results and performance.

9. Standardise the testing for each sport or a skill and repeat it in same sequence. Different age groups would have different standards and choice of testing



The right order: Testing should start with non-fatiguing tests such as anthropometric measurements followed by power, speed, strength, muscle endurance and finishing with aerobic activities. THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY

components.

10. All the test results should be made available to the athletes, coaching staff and management to help them in decision-making.

11. Provide proper instructions to all the athletes ahead of testing so they can clearly understand what is required of them to execute a test and to be motivated to perform with maximum effort.

12. Safety procedure and precautions should be in place in case the athlete is injured during testing.

13. Adequate rest and time should be given for recovery during trials and tests to get the best desired results.

14. Pre-test medical screening is of paramount importance to prevent any emergency issues or complications.

Don'ts in testing procedures

- * Not validating the results acquired to the athlete or coaches or management.

- * Testing at different times and different surfaces will lead to varied results and not the right data collection.

- * Improper procedures followed during testing and measurements.

- * Favouritism showed to a particular athlete or group in collecting and manipulating test results.

- * Not doing the right sequencing of tests.

- * Inconsistent in testing, poorly done, at the wrong time or in the wrong way can give wrong results and message to the whole group or athlete.

- * The testing coach should be transparent in sharing the results with the concerned group or athletes or management.

- * Choosing the wrong test for a skill is showing an appetite for destruction.

- * Wrong comparative studies with the results of other non-related groups.

- * Demotivating the athletes prior to the testing through harsh words or not giving a proper explanation regarding the testing and the results.

- * Making an athlete uncomfortable prior to the testing by embarrassing them at various stages in front of fellow athletes with cues or words. It is highly demotivating for the athlete.

- * Highly unethical processes of modifying or altering or inaccurately scoring test results to suit their professional needs or to stay in the post.

- * Strength-and-conditioning coaches failing to identify the athlete is not giving 100 percent in each testing can affect the reliability of the test.

- * Finally, undermining an athlete's effort and motive can be counterproductive to he or she giving their best and taking the test in the future.

The bottom line

Testing the athletes and tracking those test results over time is fundamental to effecting a successful strength-and-conditioning programme that is valid for your sport and skill. ☺

There was a dignity about the man

P. K. Banerjee knew everything and everybody in football, and had the magnanimity to share easily what he had worked hard at acquiring.

SURESH MENON

A few weeks into my career, I was looking forward to reporting a Ranji Trophy semifinal when, out of the blue, I was asked to go to Kolkata to report the inaugural Jawaharlal Nehru international football tournament. I hadn't even reported Bengaluru's local league at that stage, but I carried with me the confidence of youth. I quickly realised I needed more than that. I was new to the city, new to the sport and new to the profession.

P. K. Banerjee — Pradip *da* to me and legions of his friends — hand-held me through my first major assignment. He was the national coach, a passionate, articulate, energetic man at the height of his coaching career. He was my coach too.

He introduced me to players, to international coaches and officials. I was let into his charmed circle. It was a privilege. He let me travel in the team bus. It was an amazing show of generosity and kindness towards a youngster he was meeting for the first time.

We met often after that. During national camps, at other tournaments, on his visits to Bengaluru, and later when I travelled to Kolkata to report cricket. I once wrote a piece criticising him, especially his remark that Indian players didn't know how to trap the ball. This was a strange thing for a coach to say. Someone sent Pradip *da* a clipping.

It didn't make the slightest difference to our relationship. He never mentioned it, conscious that he had

his job to do and I had mine.

Over the years as cricketers showed their displeasure in various ways after I had criticised them in print, I always remembered Pradip *da*'s reaction, or lack of it. There was a dignity about the man, and an understand-

ing of the rules of the game. I can't think of anyone in sport who took criticism with such equanimity, and I include all the great Indian sportsmen of the last three or four decades.

I never saw Pradip *da* play, but it must have been a treat. Old-timers spoke of his powerful right foot and an equally powerful left in an age when Indian players tended to favour one over the other. He played for the unfashionable Eastern Railway and led them to the league title in Kolkata. He was an Olympian twice over and an Asian Games gold medallist. It was no coincidence that his playing days saw the

golden age of Indian football.

He loved to talk. And he could swing from the depths of knowledge to the edges of gossip without any effort. He knew everything and everybody in football, and had the magnanimity to share easily what he had worked hard at acquiring. In his passing, I have lost a friend and an early mentor — for not only was Pradip *da* India's 'Mr. Football' for decades as player and coach, he was also someone who lived a seamless life between the sport and his life. Life lessons bled into football and vice versa. Go well, Pradip *da*... ☺

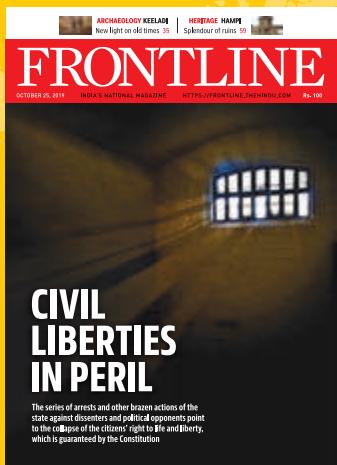


Superstar: P. K. Banerjee was an Olympian twice over and an Asian Games gold medallist. It was no coincidence that his playing days saw the golden age of Indian football.

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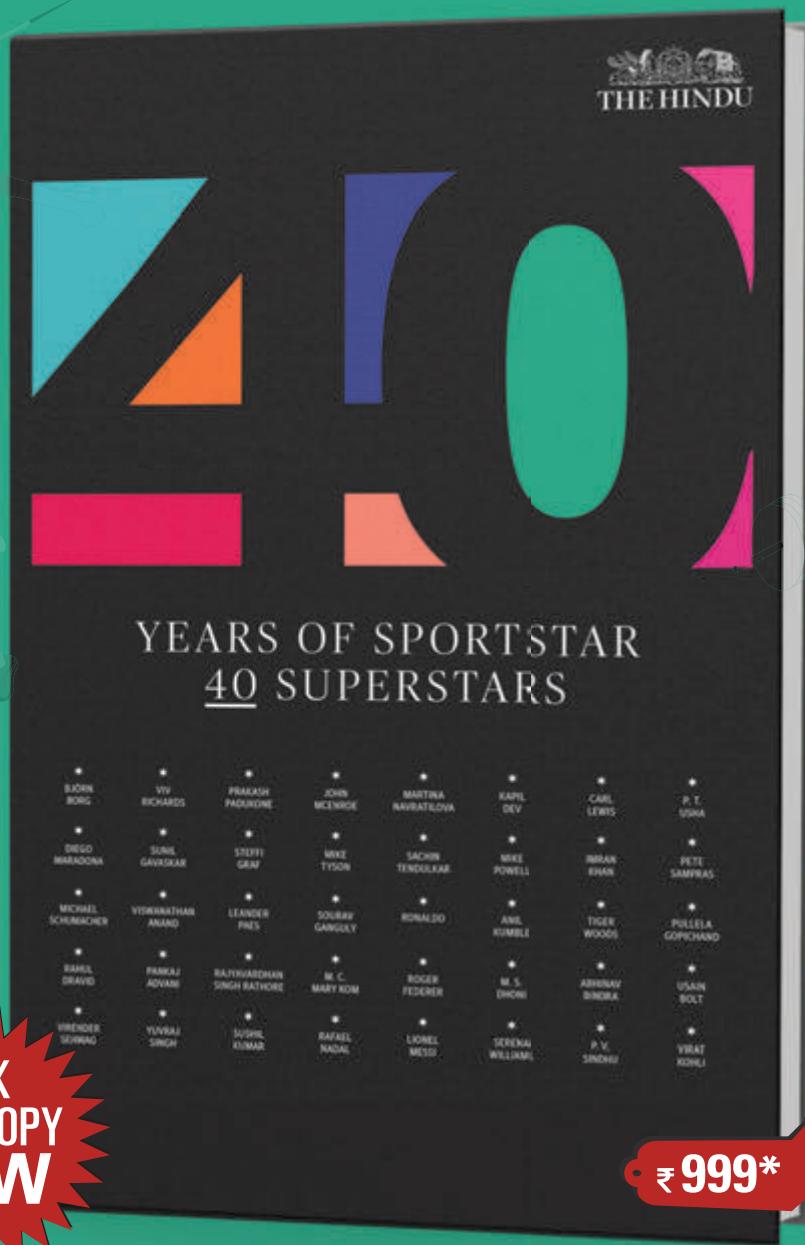
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